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WELCOME

WELCOME TO issue 177 of NEO! This month we've got some epic coverage for you on everything from our favourite John Woo movies (page 058) to our pick of the best cosplay from the crowds at the MCM Comic Con in London this May (page 060). Check out our bumper feature and see if you can spot yourself, or a friend! And if you weren't included, not to worry. We'd love to feature you in an upcoming issue, so make sure you email your images in to us at mail@neomag.co.uk. While I'm on the topic of reader submissions, don't forget to get in touch with us if you're a budding artist or manga author! Our monthly Artist Showcase (page 046) needs you, so if you've created some amazing original art and you'd like us to show it off for you, email to that same address. Same for the manga extract, which is on page 087 this issue. It's so much fun to get emails from talented readers and we love to celebrate our homegrown talent, so make sure you're not hiding your light under a bushel and get involved in showing off how awesome our readers really are!

This issue we also have features from two new writers – meet them below! Alex Jones penned our amazing Bushiroad flipper feature on page 098, all about *Cardfight!! Vanguard!* and *BanG Dream! Girls Band Party!*, and Emily Valentine had the mammoth task of interviewing Netflix's latest star, Aggretsuko, over on page 044! I'd like to say a warm welcome to both of them!

Until next time!

GEMMA COX, EDITOR



MEET THE TEAM

EMILY VALENTINE



"I'm excited to have kicked off my first article for NEO mag with a piece about Aggretsuko – Sanrio's newest superstar and the star of her own Netflix show. I even had a chat with the death metal loving red panda herself!"

ALEX JONES



"After enjoying *Crybaby* so much earlier in the year I've finally had the chance to check out the original manga thanks to Seven

Seas' new hardback edition. Highly recommended – the wait for the second half in October not so much!"

JONATHAN CLEMENTS



"Touched to see Hungary's Eurovision entry striking a Ginyu Force pose from *DBZ*. And with Israel's winning lyrics, 'I'm taking my Pikachu home,' I guess a whole generation of weebs is running the show now."

DAVID WEST



"Another day, another dollar; another month, another Mothra. Or something. This month I very nearly rolled my eyes clear

out of my head watching *Birth Of The Dragon*, but at least I had *The Spiritual Boxer* to cheer me up!"

ADAM MILLER



"June is officially the worst month in Japan! The rainy season brings downpours and humidity, and it's also the only month without a national holiday. I already miss spring and dread the impending summer!"

JACOB BONIFACE



"This month, I was pretty disappointed to find out that the cinematic re-release of *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Movie* isn't going to be playing in my hometown, but I hope that lots of you NEO readers out there will get the chance to go see it!"

ANDREW OSMOND



"I've been listening to the *Lupin* theme a lot – I wrote loads about *Lupin* this issue! – and to the rockers Man With a Mission, who did the great themes for *Golden Kamuy* and *Inuyashiki*. But their wolf masks just look silly to me..."

MITCHELL LINEHAM



"MCM Comic Con has been and gone but I met both Kevin Conroy and Jim Cummings – yay! I've been watching *My Hero Academia* (again) and I'm patiently waiting for *BlazBlue: Cross Tag Battle* to come out!"

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PEACE SELLS...BUT WHO'S BUYING?

In *Yu-sibu*, a former hero adjusts to life as a retail drone. What can anime, films and TV teach us about the fate of warriors in peacetime? NEO's David West sets out to beat swords into plowshares.

RAUL CHASER THOUGHT he was born for greatness. He devoted his life to becoming a hero, his blade sworn to defend humanity in the war against the Demon King and his infernal hordes. Then the Demon King was defeated, and Raul suddenly found that the world no longer had any need for heroes.

Now, he works for the retail chain Leon, selling magically-powered white goods but somehow trying to shift TVs, microwaves, washers, tumble dryers, and fridges hasn't proved as satisfying as slaying demons. The only bright spot in his day is his new sales colleague, Fino, the daughter of the deposed Demon King. Where she once expected to reign in terror alongside her pernicious pop, now she asks Leon customers for their loyalty cards. Peace, it seems, can be a hard burden to bear in *Yu-sibu* – *I Couldn't Be A Hero, So I Reluctantly Decided To Get A Job*.

THE BURDENS OF PEACE

The series is set in a world that seems contemporaneous to our own, with modern appliances, clothing, and infrastructure that happen to be infused with magic, yet there is a historical precedent for the concept of a country that no longer needs its warrior class. Prior to the Battle Of Sekigahara in 1600, Japan had endured more than a century of clan warfare, with different factions competing for power and influence as the Emperor's authority waned. The warrior class, the samurai, rose in prominence as daimyo – feudal lords – needed men to fight on the battlefield. But the decisive Battle Of Sekigahara saw the Tokugawa clan defeat their rivals the Toyotomi and assert their right to rule the country. In 1603 Ieyasu Tokugawa

became Shogun, the military ruler of Japan whose authority relegated the Emperor to a figurehead, and peace was imposed on the land, creating a surplus of fighting men. Those samurai with connections and an education found employment on the estates of the regional governors, becoming clerks and administrators. The once proud samurai was reduced to a glorified office worker, keeping ledgers of rice stores and issuing travel permits. Much like a former demon slaying swordsman stuck selling washing machines.

The feudal system that the Tokugawa Dynasty established would last for more than three centuries and it saw Japan enter a long period of peace, bar the occasional peasant uprising or rebellion, but this stability came at the cost of stagnation. Society was rigidly stratified under the shi-no-ko-sho class system, divided into samurai, peasant farmers, artisans and merchants. The merchants tended to have the most money, the artisans produced all the trappings of civilisation, while the peasants grew all the food. Stuck at the bottom of the ladder, the peasants may have grown the rice upon which everyone relied, but they saw very little of the fruits of their labour. Instead, the samurai, who produced little and grew nothing, reaped the benefits.

It was a fundamentally unfair system, but it was kept afloat by shushigaku – the concept that a person's lot in life is predetermined. Put simply, born a samurai, live and die a samurai. Born a dirt-poor farmer, that's how you live and die, and change is never an option. As much as it was a useful tool for keeping the peasants in line, shushigaku had its downside for those samurai who lacked employment, for it meant that they couldn't give up their assigned role in society. With >>>



Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai was Takashi Miike's 2011 remake of *Harakiri*.





1. This looks far, far worse than it actually is. Honest. 2. Again, this just looks suggestive. It's really all in your mind, you filthy beast. 3. That moment when you remember you left your straighteners on. 4. The scent of blood attracts the hungry dogs – Sanjuro has to go looking for trouble to survive. 5. Rurouni Kenshin, the swordsman with the blunted blade. But at least his eyebrows are sharp.

FATE STRIKES AGAIN

Toshiro Mifune, who so perfectly embodied the cinematic samurai, was another war veteran, having been an aerial photographer in the air force. He originally wanted to be a cameraman in the film industry and only attended the audition for Toho's *New Faces* acting programme because the camera department was full.

>>> no call for their swordsmanship, they either became ronin, men for hire, eking out a precarious living whenever a lord needed men to suppress an uprising, or they fell into crime and became yakuza – gangsters.

Unlike Raul Chaser in *Yusibu*, the strict laws governing society made it nigh impossible for them to hang up their blades and become merchants. This dilemma has been explored in several of the most influential samurai films ever made. Masaki Kobayashi's *Hara-kiri*, from 1962, sees a destitute samurai forced to commit ritual suicide when his plot to get a wealthy clan to give him the money he needs for a doctor for his sick wife goes terribly wrong. Motome (Akira Ishihama) has no other choice but to present himself at the gates of the Iyi clan requesting permission to use their grounds to kill himself. He hopes they'll give him some money and send him on his way, but the ruthless Iyi officials decide to make an example of him and force him to go through with the ritual. Motome, once committed, can't refuse. He's trapped under the weight of a system that only allows him one role,



that of the samurai, in a destitute life and gruesome death.

THE LURE OF BATTLE

Where Kobayashi's *Hara-kiri* is a tragedy, Akira Kurosawa explored the dilemma of the warrior during peacetime in two comedies. *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro* both star Toshiro Mifune as a wandering swordsman calling himself Sanjuro who has to go wherever there's trouble brewing in order to make a living. In *Yojimbo*, the ronin hires himself out to two warring gangs in a small town, playing them off against each other. Then in *Sanjuro* he comes to the aid of a group of young and very naïve samurai who have discovered corruption in their clan.

Sanjuro knows no other life than that of the swordsman. "The scent of blood attracts the hungry dogs," sneers a farmer upon seeing Sanjuro, who can never settle down or stop travelling. Once a conflict is concluded, he must move on and find the next one, for it's only where there's violence that he can find employment. He has no skills suitable for a town, or world, at peace. He can't lay down his sword, it's all he has and





"HE HAS NO SKILLS SUITABLE FOR A TOWN, OR WORLD, AT PEACE. HE CAN'T LAY DOWN HIS SWORD, IT'S ALL HE HAS AND HIS PATH IN LIFE IS PREDETERMINED – IT'S SHUSHIGAKU AT WORK."

his path in life is predetermined – it's shushigaku at work.

Yojimbo and *Sanjuro*, like *Hara-kiri*, are set during the long stagnation of the Tokugawa Period and while that's the most popular setting for chanbara stories about swordsmen out of step with the times, Nobuhiro Watsuki's *Rurouni Kenshin* takes place at a later moment in history. Set in the aftermath of the civil war that accompanied the Meiji Restoration, which saw the Tokugawa Shogunate overthrown as power was restored to the Emperor, the series follows another wandering swordsman called Himura Kenshin as he tries to atone for his violent past. Kenshin, like any samurai caught in the grip of shushigaku, is unable to lay down his sword so, to avoid perpetuating his history of bloodshed, he carries a sword that's blunt on the outside edge and only sharp on the inward curved side.

It's deeply impractical, but that's the point. If you're predestined to be a swordsman but you're tired of the carnage, best to limit your ability to cut people to ribbons. Like *Sanjuro*, *Kenshin* doesn't consider simply laying down his sword. Even as Japanese society changes and the Meiji Restoration ushers in the abolition of the samurai class, the swordsman is trapped by his role. In that regard at least, *Raul Chaser* is luckier than *Kenshin*. Living in a period without the rigid class definitions of the feudal era, *Raul* has the option to put his sword aside and

join the merchant class. It's just that it's far, far less exciting than fighting demons.

The thrill of battle can be a difficult siren song to resist. In Kobayashi's *Samurai Rebellion*, from 1967, Isaburo Sasahara (Toshiro Mifune) is a samurai in the employ of Lord Matsudaira, who decides to get rid of his mistress Ichi (Yoko Tsukasa) by marrying her to Sasahara's eldest son, Yogoro (Go Kato). Despite the circumstances of their arranged marriage, the couple fall in love and have a child, so when Matsudaira orders Sasahara to return Ichi to him, he refuses. This one act of defiance escalates into conflict and as Sasahara prepares for Matsudaira's men to attack his home, he seems oddly happy, saying to his younger son, "Tell everyone for me, for the first time in my life I feel really alive."

Sasahara is a swordsman living in peacetime and the outbreak of hostilities lets him revert to what he does best, to be a fighter and warrior, even as he casts off the suffocating burden of bushido which demands unthinking obedience to his lord and to his clan. He tried to live in peace and somehow it just didn't sit well. Fate is inescapable.

SLAYING IN SUNNYDALE

It's not just Japanese anime and movies that have explored this theme. Joss Whedon's *Buffy The Vampire* TV series, that >>>

PACIFIST

Masaki Kobayashi, director of *Hara-kiri* and *Samurai Rebellion*, had first-hand experience of war, having been drafted into the Japanese Imperial Army in 1941. He refused to be promoted in protest against the military regime's actions and became a committed pacifist, which may explain his films' deep empathy towards doomed warriors.



"PEACE, IT SEEMS, CAN BE A HARD BURDEN TO BEAR IN *YU-SIBU* – *I COULDN'T BE A HERO, SO I RELUCTANTLY DECIDED TO GET A JOB.*"

CLOSED DOORS

In the 1630s, the Tokugawa Shogunate put the country into national seclusion – sakoku – to prevent outside influences, like Christianity, from disrupting their fanatically maintained status quo. Japanese citizens were forbidden from travelling abroad and any who did so risked the death penalty. Sakoku was abolished in 1853 under American pressure.

>>> ran from 1996 to 2003, features Sarah Michelle Gellar in the title role. The vampire Slayers – Buffy, Faith (Eliza Dushku) and Kendra (Bianca Lawson) – are much like samurai in that they are defined and constrained by their role as warriors. Buffy longs for a normal life, seen in her attempt to become Homecoming Queen – “I could open a yearbook someday and say, ‘I was there. I went to high school and had friends and for just one minute, I got to live in the world.’ And there’d be proof. Proof that I was chosen for something other than this.”

Kendra regards her mission as a calling, telling Buffy, “You talk about it as if it’s a job. It’s not. It’s who you are,” which sounds an awful lot like shushigaku. Of the three Slayers who appear in the series, it’s Faith who most clearly expresses the notion of the warrior unable to lay down their arms. Like the

wandering ronin of *Yojimbo*, she follows the scent of blood and her arrival in Sunnydale presages violence. “You’re still not looking at the big picture, B,” she tells Buffy. “Something made us different. We’re warriors. We were built to kill.”

When Buffy tries to counter that their role is to kill demons, not pass judgement on people, “like we’re better than everybody else,” Faith replies, “We are better. That’s right. Better. People need us to survive.” Faith professes to have embraced her role as a warrior, but she’s still trapped by shushigaku. After waking from a coma following her defeat by Buffy, she immediately seeks out her nemesis. Then later, when she’s taken possession of Buffy’s body and has the chance to leave Sunnydale, she stays to fight a group of vampires that have taken humans as hostages in a church. She





only knows how to fight. There's nothing else that gives her life meaning, that expresses who and what she is as a warrior. That's some heavy predeterminism at work.

In *Yu-sibu*, Raul observes, "there's no longer a place for us," referring to unwanted warriors in peacetime. His friend, swordswoman turned shopworker Airi, struggles with the same lost purpose. "This isn't what I should be doing," she laments in vain.

NINJAS IN LOVE AND WAR

In *Boruto: Naruto Next Generations*, the once impulsive shinobi Naruto Uzumaki has finally achieved his life's dream – he's become the Seventh Hokage of the Hidden Leaf Village in the aftermath of the terrible Fourth Shinobi War. But it's not quite what he thought. The idealism and adventure of his youth have been replaced by paperwork and responsibility. For a character as pugnacious and fiery as Naruto was as a child and teenager, adulthood and peace clearly sit heavily on his shoulders.

Other warriors find peace to be fleeting and fragile. In

Basilisk and the live-action adaptation *Shinobi: Heart Under Blade*, the two rival ninja clans, the Toga and the Iga, have finally achieved a tentative peace during the early years of the Tokugawa Dynasty. Gennosuke of the Koga and Oboro of the Iga plan to wed, their union intended to bring a lasting end to the incessant fighting, but the Shogunate fears the power of the united ninja families and organises a contest to pit them against each other in the hopes they will wipe each other out. The problem for the Koga and Iga is that peace has rendered them obsolete, like a swordsman trained to fight demons when the demons have all been vanquished. Knowing that warriors will always be warriors, the Shogun ruthlessly decides to eliminate them before they take up arms against the new regime.

Luckily for Raul Chaser in *Yu-sibu*, his boss Seara doesn't consider him a threat to the Leon retail business and he's allowed to live and work alongside Fino, the daughter of his old nemesis. Peace makes for strange bedfellows!

Yu-sibu - I Couldn't Become A Hero, So I Reluctantly Decided To Get A Job is out now on DVD and Blu-ray from MVM. ●

6. That warm feeling of pure joy when you give your girlfriend an iron for her birthday. Try it, we double-dare you. 7. Gennosuke, moody ninja of *Basilisk*, thought he'd never meet a girl who loves lurking in shadows as much as he does. 8. Ninjas. They love lurking, throwing stars, and teenage angst. 9. You could charge into battle in armour. Or a bikini. Really, they're basically the same thing. 10. Red, tired eyes? You need Opti-eze eye drops and possibly an exorcist. 11. Fino really has a knack for getting splattered with unfortunate-looking liquids.





MCM COMIC CON ANIME NEWS ROUND-UP

Now the dust has settled and we've had a nice cup of tea, NEO gathers up all the anime titles revealed at MCM London Comic Con.

ANOTHER MAY HAS come and gone, bringing with it the latest seething, thronging maelstrom of all things otaku at MCM London Comic Con. As tradition dictates, the anime panels threw out a host of new title announcements from Anime Ltd and MVM, giving an indication of what will be emptying our bank accounts in the months ahead.

Anime Ltd revealed they're planning a 20th anniversary edition of *Cowboy Bebop*, but quite what it will contain remains to be revealed. From the vaults of anime greats, Satoshi Kon's psychological thriller *Perfect Blue* will be released in a remastered edition including a soundtrack CD and an exclusive 380-page storyboard book. *Angelic Layer*, the series from the CLAMP manga collective about a contest where humans control 'dolls' in battle, is heading for a debut on Blu-ray in a Collector's Edition, bringing it back to UK audiences for the first time since 2005. Another blast from anime's past, the year 2000 to be precise, *Cardcaptor Sakura The Movie 2: The Sealed Card* is coming to Blu-ray, while on the new release front, there's *Amanchu!* about two scuba-diving friends.

After much wrangling behind-the-scenes, Anime Ltd has finally secured season one of *Sound! Euphonium* about the members of a high school brass band. Mecha fans rejoice, as the distributor has confirmed two more entries in

the *Gundam* franchise. *Mobile Suit Gundam Thunderbolt: December Sky* is a feature-length adventure that will only be available as a Limited Edition Blu-ray. The distributor has acquired both seasons, the OVA and the movie spin-off of *Mobile Suit Gundam 00*, but no word yet on formats for the release. Finally, Anime Ltd will expand their record collection with a vinyl release of the *FLCL* soundtrack, and move into documentary with *Hayao Miyazaki: Never-Ending Man*, a portrait of Studio Ghibli's head honcho.

THE ONSLAUGHT CONTINUES

MVM's new titles include *The Heroic Legend Of Arslan: Dust Storm Dance*, the second season of the superb historical adventure anime that was first brought to the UK by Universal. *Arslan* will be released on DVD and Blu-ray with both subs and dubs. *Seven Mortal Sins* sees the sexy fallen angel Lucifer on a campaign to defeat the Seven Sins, the Demon Lords who rule Hell. The salacious series will be available on DVD and Blu-ray, with subs and dubs.

Don't let the kawaii character art of *Higurashi: When They Cry* fool you. The series is adapted from a murder mystery game and promises to be one of the darker releases of the year. MVM are planning a Blu-ray Collector's Edition,



For more
info about the next
London MCM Comic
Con event, taking
place between 26-28
October, head to
www.mcmcomiccon.com/london.

containing all three seasons, for 3 September, followed on 15 October by each individual season separately on DVD and Blu-ray.

Bakuon! is a comedy about girls who love motorbikes, racing onto DVD and Blu-ray in August, while in *Starmyu*, the gorgeous boys of Ayana Academy chase their dreams of becoming music idols. This one will be a subs-only release on DVD and Blu-ray, containing both seasons of the show and the OVA, release date TBC.

Finally, *Sagrada Reset* concerns two teenagers with special powers – Haruki Misora can reset time in three-day jumps, while Kei Asai has a photographic memory that even lets him remember events after Haruki resets time. First announced in May 2017, the series was confirmed for release this year on DVD and Blu-ray. The anime future looks bright indeed for UK otaku! ●

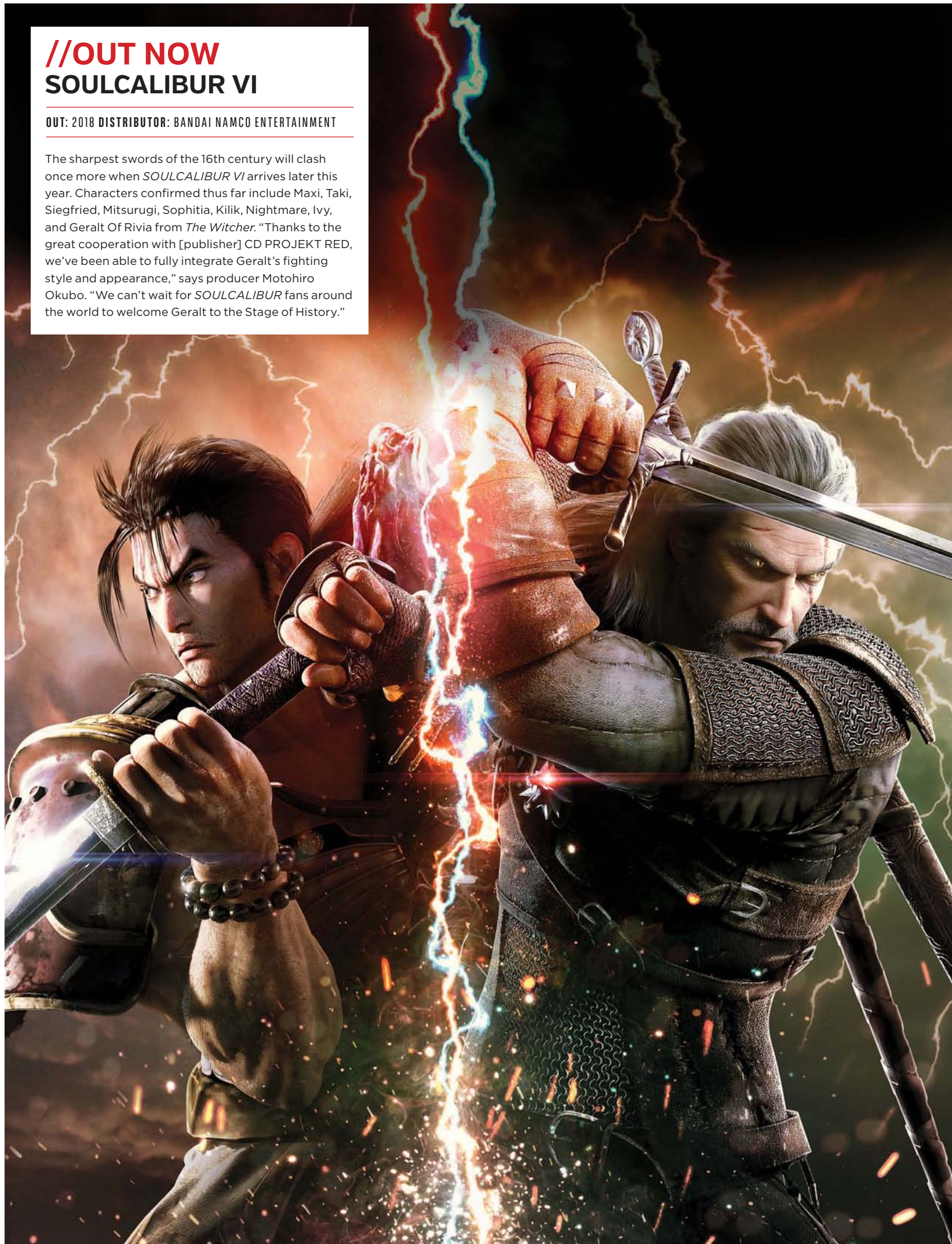


//OUT NOW

SOULCALIBUR VI

OUT: 2018 DISTRIBUTOR: BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT

The sharpest swords of the 16th century will clash once more when *SOULCALIBUR VI* arrives later this year. Characters confirmed thus far include Maxi, Taki, Siegfried, Mitsurugi, Sophitia, Kilik, Nightmare, Ivy, and Geralt Of Rivia from *The Witcher*. "Thanks to the great cooperation with [publisher] CD PROJEKT RED, we've been able to fully integrate Geralt's fighting style and appearance," says producer Motohiro Okubo. "We can't wait for *SOULCALIBUR* fans around the world to welcome Geralt to the Stage of History."



New GUNDAM BREAKER



BREAK... BUILD... BATTLE!



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NEO'S TOPTEN

Our roundup of the hottest tracks currently
blasting on the office stereo

WORDS BY TOM SMITH

1 THE GAZETTE – FALLING 15 JUNE

It's been almost three years since Japan's visual kei veterans the Gazette unleashed eighth album *DOGMA* – easily their heaviest, most aggressive and darkest outing yet. Since then, the band has been a bit silent on the new music front. There were two new singles; *UGLY* and *UNDYING*, but these were more extensions of *DOGMA* than teasers of what to expect from a future album. Now, close to three years later, the silence on new material has been broken with the news of upcoming album *NINTH*.

Little to no details had been revealed about the Gazette's ninth album besides its title, but now, just weeks before the CD is due to hit the shops in Japan and in the UK, the full tracklisting and cover art have been revealed – and it looks every bit as cool as we expected!

The album will feature 12 tracks, including *Falling* from their latest music video, and will be released here via JPU Records on 15 June with translated lyrics included in the booklet. *NINTH* will also be made available for digital download here one week ahead of Japan. You can pre-order it now from iTunes and JPU's webshop.

NEW ALBUM!



NEW SINGLE! LONDON SHOW!



2 DIR EN GREY – NINGEN WO KABURU 16 OCTOBER

Visual kei extremists Dir en grey are back in town this October for a show at The Electric Ballroom in Camden, London, on 16 October as part of their "Wearing Human Skin" tour. The news broke within days of the band announcing the release of latest single *Ningen wo Kaburu*, out now on iTunes.

Bassist Toshia comments, "It has been three years since our last time in Europe and we are all very excited about finally going back. We plan to play our older songs and also include new songs so everyone should look forward to our European shows. Plus, we want to enjoy touring Europe while taking in all of its history, beautiful architecture and amazingly rich culture."

Tickets are on sale now, and the London show is part of an eight-date European tour. Full details are available from Nine Lives Entertainment's website: www.nle.rocks.

LONDON DATES!



3 BTS – DON'T LEAVE ME 9/10 OCTOBER

This is going to be big. We can't remember the last time an Asian act headed to the UK for a show and the first we heard about it was from the actual proper British media! The Sun! The Independent! The Metro even had a piece about how UK fans "lost their chill" the moment tour dates were announced – and when those tour dates include a double helping of London's O2 Arena, we lost our chill just a little bit too!

It will be the first time that Korea's BTS has had a concert in the UK. The shows are part of their LOVE YOURSELF world tour, and include numerous dates across North America and Europe. The tour poster also hints that more dates may be on the way.

Tickets are on sale now from AXS's website. To celebrate, HMV Oxford Street has imported a number of BTS's latest Japanese album *FACE YOURSELF*.

NEW ALBUM! LONDON DATES!



4 ROA – HITSUGENIUS 13-17 JULY

Up and coming shamisen rockers ROA have just released their fantastic debut overseas album *RODIAC* through JPU Records, and now they're jetting off to the UK for a festival appearance and headline show!

The band, who mix punk rock music with traditional shamisen instruments, will perform at HYPER JAPAN in Olympia between 13-15 July, and then perform a headline show at The Underworld in Camden Town on 17 July.

Latest music video *Hitsugenius* just hit YouTube too and documents the band's adventures at Japan Expo Sud in Marseilles earlier this year, including lots of free hugs and cosplayers.

5 CRYSTAL LAKE – APOLLO 4/5 JULY

Tokyo's metalcore heroes Crystal Lake are back in Europe for their second tour, this time throwing in a festival date and headline show while in the United Kingdom. The screamy boys will be tearing up London's Boston Music Room on 4 July, followed by an appearance at UK-Tech Fest 2018 in Newark the next day. The band will then ferry over to Paris for Japan Expo and further dates across continental Europe. You'll have to be quick: at the time of writing most ticket sites have sold out for the London headline show.

Tickets are on sale now along with latest single *Apollo*. Crystal Lake's last two albums are out now on CD through JPU Records.

NEW EP! FESTIVAL DATE!



6 LOVEBITES – THE CRUSADE OUT NOW

Tokyo's iron maidens LOVEBITES are back. Their debut album *Awakening From Abyss* got rave reviews, even leading to the ladies winning "Best New Band" by Metal Hammer. New mini-album *Battle Against Damnation* is out now in the UK and the physical version includes a booklet with lyrics and English liner notes from each member. Lead track *THE CRUSADE* was available instantly to all who pre-ordered the album digitally, and has a video on YouTube that sees the band live on stage. Overseas, we'll get a chance to see them at Bloodstock Open Air festival on 10 August.

7 HOTEL – BATTLE WITHOUT HONOR OR HUMANITY

"It's such a thrill to be able to play at my favourite venue," states Japan's original guitar hero HOTEL ahead of his upcoming performance at London's Shepherds Bush Empire on 20 October. "I promise I will play my guitar with a delicate, yet cutting edge and powerful sound." This time round the venue is getting fitted fully with seating so fans can enjoy a more relaxed atmosphere. "I am looking forward to meeting lots of music lovers!". Tickets are on sale now via Ticket Master.

NEW SINGLE! NEW LONDON DATE!



8 ESPRIT D'AIR – CALLING YOU 12 SEPTEMBER

Cosmic rockers Esprit D'Air have just unleashed their brand new music video and single *Calling You*. The video sees the band rock out around various places in central London and is a completely new track not found on their recently released *Constellations* album. The digital single includes three versions of the title track, including a piano version.

The band have also announced a new European tour for September that includes a show at The Boston Music Room in London on 12 September.

9 DEADLIFT LOLITA – PUMP UP JAPAN 13-15 JULY

Get ready, Japan's strongest idol unit is heading to the UK! LADYBEARD, formerly of LADYBABY viral fame, has joined forces with kawaii wrestler and bodybuilder Reika Saiki to form DEADLIFT LOLITA.

The pair, with more collective muscle than the entire NEO team combined, will be attending HYPER JAPAN in Olympia between 13-15 July, and will be their first UK appearance as the unit.

ENGLAND DATES!



NEW SINGLE!



10 LADYBABY – HOSHI NO NAI SORA OUT NOW

LADYBABY are back with their first release under a new line-up. Original member Rie remains and is joined by three new faces; Nana, Emiri and Fuka. The new single includes three completely new tracks and their instrumental versions. One track, *Beri Beri Money* even sees guest vocals from former member LADYBEARD too! The single *Hoshi no Nai Sora* is out now digitally for download and streaming via JPU Records.

CAT-ASTROPHE

JONATHAN CLEMENTS ON THE LATEST DING-DANG DING-DONG

At Tonghuamen station in the Chinese city of Xi'an, a man is dressed as Doraemon, the big, fluffy blue cat, hero of many a manga series, and known in China as Ding-Dang, the Time Travelling Cat. "DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?" he yells at me through the mouth of his costume.

"Indeed I do," I say, not stopping. He starts to scurry after me, his big clown-cat-feet flopping on the dusty pavement.

"SAY MY NAME, THEN! WHAT'S MY NAME?"

"Ding-Dang, the Time Travelling Cat." I resist the urge to add that the Chinese media have recently outed Ding-Dang as an agent of Japanese oppression, with an insidious soft-power message designed to distract them from the ongoing dispute over the Senkaku Islands. Mainly because I don't know the Chinese for *soft power* (it is *ruan shili*, for next time).

"BECAUSE A CHINESE COURT HAS JUST RULED THAT ROBOT CAT [JIQIMAO], A TRADEMARK REGISTERED BY A FUJIAN SPORTSWEAR FIRM, IS A BLATANT COPY OF DORAEMON, SO THEIR RIGHT TO USE THE IMAGE HAS BEEN REVOKED, FOUR YEARS AFTER THEY TRIED TO REGISTER IT."

"NOT BAD! AND LET ME TELL YOU, LARGE FOREIGN FRIEND, YOU'LL WISH YOU HAD A TIME MACHINE IF YOU DON'T SIGN UP RIGHT NOW FOR ONE OF THE UNITS ON OFFER AT THE RENWEI TOWERS CITY DEVELOPMENT, COMING SOON RIGHT NEAR HERE."

He has to shout because he is wearing an all-over velour suit designed to make him look like a giant blue cat. The thermometer is climbing towards 30 degrees today, so I think the heat might have driven him a little bit loopy.

"I'm not interested," I say.

"TIME MACHINES AREN'T REALLY REAL, YOU KNOW. YOU CAN'T ACTUALLY GO BACK IN TIME AND SIGN UP FOR THIS OFFER LATER ON."

"In which case, how did you get here, Ding-Dang?"

There is a pause, while Ding-Dang the Time Travelling Cat thinks about this.

"TO TELL THE TRUTH, I AM STUDYING FOR A DEGREE IN MARKETING. I AM REALLY HUMAN."

"And if were you, Ding-Dang," I add, "I'd be more

worried about if you were legal."

"OF COURSE I'M LEGAL-!"

"Because a Chinese court has just ruled that Robot Cat [Jiqimao], a trademark registered by a Fujian sportswear firm, is a blatant copy of Doraemon, so their right to use the image has been revoked, four years after they tried to register it."

"Wow," says Ding-Dang, his voice suddenly low and muffled. "They really did that...?"

"Yeah. Like nobody would notice!"

"Well, apparently nobody noticed for four years," he observes.

"You got that right, Ding-Dang. I bet they wish they had a time machine now!" ●





Heaven's Lost Property

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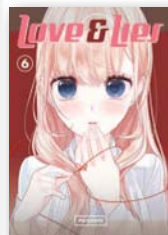
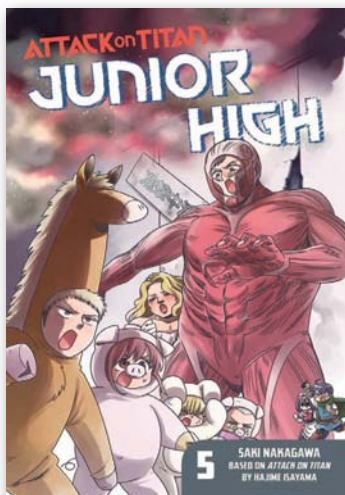
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UK release schedule



ANIME

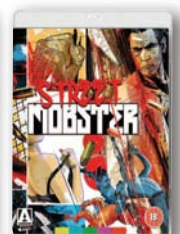
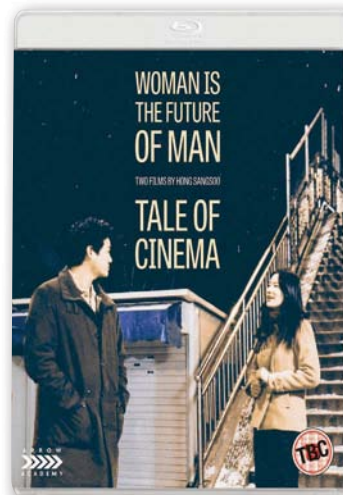
| DATE | TITLE | DISTRIBUTOR |
|-------|---|---------------|
| 25/06 | Heaven's Lost Property Season 1 Collection (Blu-ray, DVD Combi) | MVM |
| 25/06 | One Piece [Uncut] Collection 17 (DVD) | Manga |
| 25/06 | Hyouka - Part 2 (Blu-ray Collector's, DVD) | Anime Limited |
| 25/06 | Night is Short, Walk on Girl (Combi Collector's, DVD, Blu-ray) | Anime Limited |
| 25/06 | Re:Zero Part 1 (Blu-ray Collector's, DVD) | Anime Limited |
| 25/06 | Rokka - Braves of the Six Flowers- (Blu-ray Collector's, DVD) | Anime Limited |
| 25/06 | Sword Art Online II: Part 2 (DVD) | Anime Limited |
| 25/06 | Wolf's Rain (Blu-ray) | Anime Limited |
| 02/07 | Haven't You Heard? I'm Sakamoto (Combi) | Manga |
| 02/07 | Hello! Kinmoza (Combi) | Animatsu |
| 02/07 | Occultic Nine 2 (DVD, Blu-ray) | Manga |
| 09/07 | Flip Flappers Collector's Edition (Blu-ray) | MVM |
| 09/07 | Gate (DVD, Blu-ray) | MVM |
| 09/07 | Big Fish & Begonia (DVD, Blu-ray) | Manga |
| 16/07 | Initial D Legend 3: Dream (DVD, Blu-ray) | MVM |
| 16/07 | Desert Punk Collection (DVD) | MVM |
| 16/07 | Lu Over the Wall (Combi Collector's, DVD, Blu-ray) | Anime Limited |
| 16/07 | Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust (DVD, Blu-ray) | Anime Limited |
| 23/07 | Asterisk War Part 1 (DVD, Blu-ray) | MVM |
| 23/07 | Nobunaga The Fool Collection (DVD) | MVM |
| 23/07 | Pokémon Movie 14-16 Collection (DVD) | Manga |
| 23/07 | Sword of the Stranger (DVD, Blu-ray) | Anime Limited |
| 30/07 | Sword Oratoria (Combi Collector's) | MVM |



MANGA

| DATE | TITLE | DISTRIBUTOR |
|-------|-----------------|-------------|
| 21/06 | Maga-tsuki 9-10 | Kodansha |
| 21/06 | Love And Lies 6 | Kodansha |

| DATE | TITLE | DISTRIBUTOR |
|-------|---|-------------------------|
| 21/06 | That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime 6 | Kodansha |
| 21/06 | To The Abandoned Sacred Beasts 6 | Vertical |
| 26/06 | Battle Angel Alita Deluxe Edition 4 | Kodansha |
| 26/06 | Attack on Titan: Junior High 5 | Kodansha |
| 26/06 | Cardcaptor Sakura: Clear Card 4 | Kodansha |
| 28/06 | Air Gear 37 | Kodansha |
| 28/06 | LDK 11 | Kodansha |
| 28/06 | Missions Of Love 15 | Kodansha |
| 28/06 | Fire Force 10 | Kodansha |
| 28/06 | Tokyo Tarareba Girls 1 | Kodansha |
| 28/06 | Hanamonogatari | Vertical |
| 28/06 | The Flowers of Evil Complete 3 | Vertical |
| 28/06 | Astra Lost in Space 3 | Shonen Jump |
| 28/06 | Blue Exorcist 19 | VM Shonen Jump Advanced |
| 28/06 | Food Wars 24 | VM Shonen Jump Advanced |
| 28/06 | Haikyuu!! 24 | Shonen Jump |
| 28/06 | Kuroko's Basketball 2-in-1 Edition 12 | Shonen Jump |
| 28/06 | My Hero Academia 13 | Shonen Jump |
| 28/06 | One Piece 3-in-1 Edition 24 | Shonen Jump |
| 28/06 | The Promised Neverland 4 | Shonen Jump |
| 28/06 | Tokyo Ghoul: re 5 | VIZ Media |
| 12/07 | After Hours 2 | VIZ Media |
| 12/07 | Amigurumi: Sax-X Crochet Patterns | VIZ Media |
| 12/07 | Finder 7: Longing For You | SuBLime |
| 12/07 | Golden Kamuy 5 | VIZ Media |
| 12/07 | Loveless 13 | VIZ Media |
| 12/07 | Queen's Quality 4 | Shojo Beat |
| 12/07 | Sleepy Princess in the Demon Castle 1 | Viz Media |
| 12/07 | Splatoon 3 | VIZ Media |
| 12/07 | Sweet Blue Flowers 4 | Viz Media |



ASIAN FILM

| DATE | TITLE | DISTRIBUTOR |
|-------|---|-------------------------|
| 25/06 | Akio Jissoji: The Buddhist Trilogy | Arrow Academy |
| 02/07 | Ninja: Legend Of The Brave | 101 Films |
| 09/07 | Detective Bureau 2-3 Go To Hell Bastards! | Arrow Video |
| 09/07 | Tokyo Ghoul - Live Action | Anime Ltd |
| 09/07 | The Human Goddess | 88 Films |
| 09/07 | Hansel & Gretel | 88 Films |
| 16/07 | Tale Of Cinema/Woman Is The Future Of Man | Arrow Academy |
| 20/07 | The Receptionist | Munro Film Services Ltd |
| 23/07 | The Third Murder | Arrow Academy |
| 23/07 | The Human Condition Trilogy | Arrow Academy |
| 23/07 | Suffering Of Ninko | Third Window Films |
| 27/07 | Detective Dee: The Four Heavenly Kings | Cine Asia |
| 06/08 | Street Mobster | Arrow Video |
| 13/08 | The Vengeful Beauty | 88 Films |
| 13/08 | Iris: The Movie | 88 Films |
| 20/08 | Police Story/Police Story 2 | Eureka |
| 27/08 | The Liquidator | Cine Asia |

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WORDS BY DAVID WEST



Detective Bureau 2-3: Go To Hell Bastards!

CRIME WAVE AHEAD

Arrow springs Fukasaku and Suzuki from the vaults!

ARROW VIDEO HAS carved out quite the niche here in the UK by raiding the back catalogue of Nikkatsu Studios for classic Japanese crime movies, including the *Battles Without Honour And Humanity* series, oddball outings like *Doberman Cop*, and Seijun Suzuki's gangster films. But they're not finished yet!

First off, 9 July will see the Blu-ray release of *Detective Bureau 2-3: Go To Hell Bastards!*. Originally released in 1963, Seijun Suzuki's movie follows Detective Tajima (Jo Shishido) as he tracks down a load of stolen firearms, unleashing an underworld bloodbath in the process. Suzuki, bored with the formulaic scripts that Nikkatsu assigned him to direct, uses the story to lampoon the Japanese gangster film, injecting the tale with an off-kilter sense of humour and over the top stylistic excesses that include a dance number.

Next up, *Street Mobster*, from 1972, sees director Kinji Fukasaku working with his regular leading actor Bunta Sugawara just before they made the seminal *Battles Without Honour And Humanity* the following year. Okita Isamu (Sugawara) is just out of jail when he's quickly pulled into the latest turf war brewing between rival gangs in Kawasaki. The cast includes yakuza-turned-actor Noboru Ando, and Mayumi Nagisa as the prostitute with whom Isamu has, to put it mildly, a somewhat volatile relationship. Fukasaku was a master of the hard-boiled gangster drama where tempers are short, the violence is frantic, and honour is a luxury the characters can ill afford. *Street Mobster* will be out on Blu-ray on 6 August.



Street Mobster



ASSAULT SPY

Putting The Fun In Industrial Espionage

Forget hacking databases, *Assault Spy* takes industrial espionage to a whole new level as corporate snoop Asura and CIA agent Amelia smash their way through the headquarters of the Negabot corporation. Developed by Japanese indie studio Wazen, *Assault Spy* is an action game in which players control either Asura or Amelia to infiltrate Negabot, battling security robots and terrorists along the way. Defeating enemies unlocks new moves to keep the gameplay constantly evolving with a high-speed dash combat style that allows players to dodge bullets, and each character follows their own distinctive, but overlapping, storyline. *Assault Spy* comes out later this year via Steam from NIS America. Visit assaultspy.com.



THE VENGEFUL BEAUTY

The Flying Guillotines Strike Again!

In 1975, Ho Meng-Hua introduced the world to the kung fu decapitation movie with *The Flying Guillotine*, prompting a wave of imitations including Ho's *The Dragon Missile* from 1976. In 1978, the director returned to the subject (with a twist) for *The Vengeful Beauty* in which the pregnant heroine Rong Qui-Yan (Chen Ping) takes on the Flying Guillotines squad of assassins led by Jin Gang-Feng (Lo Lieh) after he kills her husband. The cast includes Norman Tsui, Yueh Hua and veteran bad guy Wang Lung-Wei. Chen Ping's career spanned action roles and sexploitation cinema like *The Sinful Adulteress*. Here, worlds collide in *The Vengeful Beauty* with its mix of kung fu mayhem – choreographed by Tong Kai of *One-Armed Swordsman* fame – and Chen's sex appeal. It's out on Blu-ray on 13 August.



LIFE ON TOUR: OKINAWA

NEO'S RESIDENT IDOL SHARES THE FUN THINGS SHE DID
IN OKINAWA DURING MOSO CALIBRATION'S JAPAN TOUR!



HELLO! MAHIRU KURUMIZAWA here, checking in for duty once again! Last issue I told you about the 47-prefecture tour of Japan I did with my group Moso Calibration. We drove to almost every part of Japan by car! One place we couldn't drive to was Okinawa – it's an island located around 400 miles south from the rest of Japan!

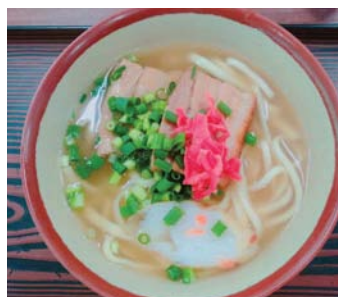
Okinawa is famous for its beautiful nature and water sports. For example, you can swim with dolphins, ride a banana boat and drive a Jet Ski. On this trip I met a dolphin and he let me touch him, and he followed my commands like “jump” and “wave bye bye”. I felt healed after spending time with him.

Okinawa's traditional food is also very delicious! My favourite food from there is Soki Soba, it's stewed pork spare ribs with soba noodles and a tasty soup. So far I've been to Okinawa three times, and every time I make sure that I eat this dish!

On this trip I also did Okinawan traditional cosplay! You can do it too at Ryukyu Village, it's a theme park based on Okinawan culture and history, and you can wear “ryu sou”, a traditional clothing. You can see me and Iori wearing it!

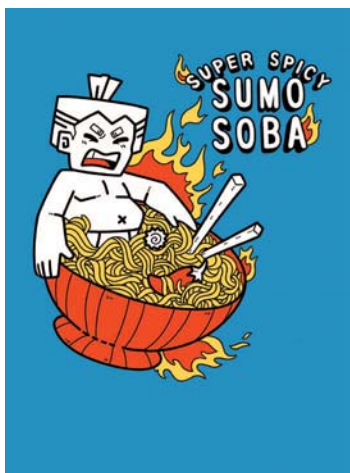
Speaking of traditional Okinawa, if you visit the island you'll see a kind of lion / dog statue on roofs and at entrances. This is called a Shisa and it's from Okinawan mythology and it sits there to protect against evil. Each member of Moso Calibration painted their own unique Shisa – someone at Ryukyu Village made a Pikachu one! It made me laugh.

Okinawa is such a lovely and charming place, so if you have time why not visit all areas of Okinawa and let me know where you enjoyed most! You can send me a message on Twitter (@lunch_mahiru) or on my English Instagram (@mahiru104). ●



WE LOVE THIS STUFF!

Check out NEO's pick of the coolest merchandise around this month



1. NEW GENKI GEAR DESIGNS

From guest artist Holly Likes (@chaosillustrations), these new Genki Gear designs are priced £16 each and available in unisex and ladies' fitted tee versions in small to XXL. Visit www.genkigear.com!

2. OKAMI STATUE

Head to animegami.co.uk to feast your eyes on this 58cm tall deluxe Shiranui resin statue. The RRP is £459, but you can save money by pre-ordering ahead of the June 2019 release date.



3. OVERWATCH SOMBRA GOOD SMILE NENDOROID

Pre-order this amazingly cute Sombra figure from www.rawckz.com now with a 25% deposit on the £46 balance! The Nendoroid will be released January 2019.

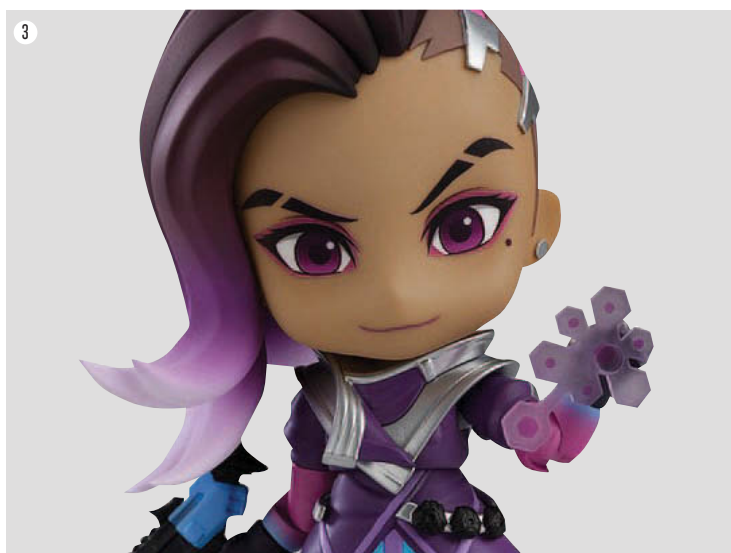


4. DARK SOULS STATUE SOLAIRE OF ASTORA

Available in October from animegami.co.uk, with free delivery, this PVC SD statue stands 23 cm tall and comes with deluxe packaging and a matching base.

5. HATSUNE MIKU SUMMER FIGURE

Feel the breeze with this original summer version of Hatsune Mike, priced £29 from www.TokyoToys.com!



6. CARDFIGHT!! VANGUARD TRIAL DECKS VOL. 01 AND 02

Stand up for these new English edition trial decks, just released for *Cardfight!! Vanguard*. Priced at £12.99 per deck, you can get Vol. 01 (Aichi Sendou) or Vol. 02 (Toshiki Kai) and start playing right away!





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//OUT NOW WOLF'S RAIN

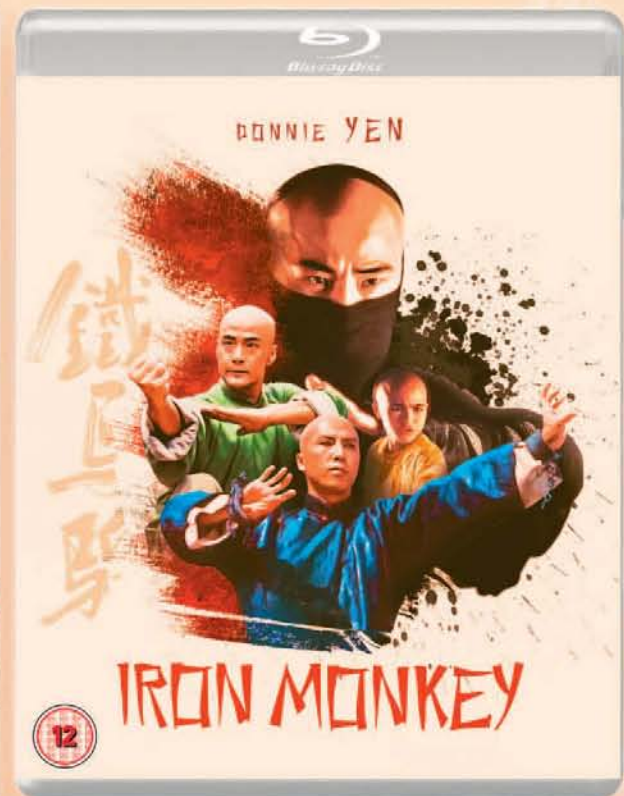
OUT: NOW / 25 JUNE (BLU-RAY) DISTRIBUTOR: ANIME LIMITED

A now classic show, *Wolf's Rain* has been released by Anime Limited as an ultimate Blu-ray package for £149.99, which includes a 100 page book featuring artwork, characters, and more. On-disc extras include interviews with the staff and cast. A standard Blu-ray will be released on 25 June, costing £39.99. Head on over to page 078 for our review of the series.

Stunning New 2K Restoration

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ANIME EXPOSÉ

LUPIN THE THIRD

Return of the Thin Man



WE'RE PRESUMING MOST NEO readers have some idea who Lupin the Third is. If you don't, we'll be brief. He's a super-thief, a lanky, loony criminal showman who's forever off on adventures involving car chases, pretty women and stunts to make David Blaine look like David Hasselhoff. Lupin's usually accompanied by a mobster gunman (Jigen) and an old-school samurai – yes, a *samurai* – called Goemon. He's frantically pursued by a monomaniac cop, Zenigata, and he's often tracked by his female rival Fujiko, queen of seduction.

Debuting in manga in 1967, Lupin's adventures have been going 50 years, but the previous paragraph pretty much covers the set-up. The Lupin TV series this season is subtitled "Part 5", but in the episodes we've seen, only one really relies on a fannish franchise in-joke – we'll get to that later. The first two Lupin series were broadcast back in the 1970s (the second ran a whopping 155 episodes), and a third followed in the 1980s. The fourth series, which is closest to this one stylistically, was shown in 2015, and should be available from Anime Limited when you read this; it's the one with Lupin running round Italy.

By the way, if you're wondering about 2012's *Lupin the Third: The Woman Called Fujiko Mine*, it's not counted retrospectively together with the other Lupin series. You may well see this as a shameful snub. *Fujiko Mine* was the boldest version of Lupin by far, reviving interest in the franchise when it had almost dropped out of sight in Japan. Or you can argue that the omission is only proper, as *Fujiko Mine*, as its subtitle implies, was much more a *Fujiko* series than a *Lupin* one.

But perhaps the issue was less about Lupin or Fujiko than the cop Zenigata. The *Fujiko* series took the police bloodhound in a shocking direction, whereas the later "canonical" series have gone out of their way to stress his honour. In effect, they seem to say that the scandalous stuff Zenigata got up to in *Fujiko* never happened, or at least that it shouldn't be spoken of again.

The early *Lupin* anime tended to be episodic, one-off capers. *Fujiko Mine* and the Italy-flavoured *Part 4* were nearer American shows; there were capers of the week, but there were also arc storylines that took over by the end of each series. *Part 5*, from what we've seen of it so far, is doing something different again. The opening episodes form an integrated serial that's wrapped up in part five; then the next episode is a kitsch, openly ridiculous homage to *Lupin's* history.

LUPIN IN CYBERLAND

The opening storyline sees Lupin in strange territory, the Internet. As a character who was invented decades before cyber-crime, Lupin hasn't tangled with it much, favouring the analog thrills of fast cars and RL assignments. But virtual larceny and real-world stunts go together sometimes. Lupin dives Bond-style into a submerged data bank, which is the (physical) home of a reclusive system architect. She turns out to be a teenage girl, Ami, who's on the Asperger-autistic spectrum, with the robot speech of unworldly heroines from Rei to Violet Evergarden. Ami's voiced in Japanese by Inori Minase and she invites comparison to another of Minase's characters –



"YOU WONDER IF THE STORY'S CYBER-TRAPPINGS WILL JUST SEEM LIKE A SAD ATTEMPT TO GET LUPIN 'WITH' THE TIMES, BUT IT TURNS OUT TO BE VERY SHARP."



Rem, the strange maid in *Re:Zero* who became one of the most interesting recent anime heroines.

At first you wonder if the story's cyber-trappings will just seem a sad effort to get a geriatric franchise in "with" the times, but it turns out to be very sharp. The caper involves thinly-disguised versions of real illegal websites like the Silk Road (an online drugs market) and the still more notorious Assassination Marketplace (a crowdfunding site which effectively funded political murders). More humorously, Lupin and his gang are chased around the world by the enthusiastic phone-wielding addicts of a "Lupin game", with clear nods to the *Pokémon Go* craze... and the story demonstrates how passing such crazes are.

Other elements of the series may divide viewers, such as gay jokes that could be seen as either slyly subversive or sadly offensive. Some conversations between Lupin and the teenage Ami go to uncomfortable places, but then rebuff potential titillation. If you remember the Bond

film *Skyfall*, and the arguments that it caused over the treatment of a victimised female character, this story makes a very interesting contrast.

As noted earlier, this multi-part tale is followed by a ludicrous episode which breaks story and style completely. It's an homage to the notoriously silly 1980s *Lupin* TV series (now designated *Lupin Part 3*, but often called *Lupin Pink Shirt* by fans). Further down the line, the PR for upcoming episodes – there'll be 24 – promises Lupin's secret life story. That's risky for a franchise that's never needed backstory before, but maybe there'll be other surprises. How about a return for Miyazaki's big contribution to the franchise – Clarisse, Princess of Cagliostro? ●

FUTURE THIEF

In 1982, *Lupin VIII* was a planned French-Japanese animated series set in space, cancelled due to rights issues. One episode was animated and can be found online, with no voice track.

ALSO STREAMING...



CALIGULA

No, it's not about a mad Roman Emperor. Rather it's a sci-fi series which begins with students in a "mundane" world that may not be all that it seems. Reportedly the series has some very heavy philosophising that's had some viewers curling their toes – perhaps Mamoru Oshii hacked the script – while some of the story elements are suspiciously close to the *Persona* franchise. Indeed, the show's based on a PlayStation game, which is known outside Japan as *The Caligula Effect*.



PERSONA 5 THE ANIMATION

Speaking of *Persona*, the new series version of the *Persona 5* game is well under way, with more characters fighting the good fight, forging their psyches into the title monster-bashing Personas. The protagonist, whom you named yourself in the source Atlus RPG, is now Ren Amamiya; he's voiced in Japanese by Jun Fukuyama, who was Lelouch in *Code Geass*. His schoolmate Ryuji is voiced by Mamoru Miyano, who was *Death Note*'s Light Yagami. Can you imagine *those* two personas working together?



GOLDEN KAMUY

Finding a patch of Japanese history that's not explored in anime much, *Golden Kamuy* takes place in the early 1900s, on the northern island of Hokkaido. A demobbed soldier hears a story of stolen gold, and ends up partnering with an Ainu woman (the Ainu were an indigenous Hokkaido people). They contend with wintry weather, rival soldiers and wolves and bears. Based on a manga now published by VIZ Media, the series has another rousing song by Man on a Mission (*Inuyashiki*).

ANIME EXPOSÉ

MEGALOBX

A *Bebop*-style boxing show



MEGALOBX ISN'T COMPLEX. It's a boxing saga, the chronicle of an underdog (the show's obsessed with dog imagery) who'll take any amount of bludgeoning punishment in his journey to be someone. But *Megalobox* will have very different resonances for western anime fans than it will for Japanese viewers.

Taking our side first, western viewers are likely to link *Megalobox* to the work of Shinichiro Watanabe and Sayo Yamamoto, though neither was involved in the production. It's a cool series, with a hero whose physical build and fight style can't help but recall a certain Spike Spiegel. *Megalobox* is also a show led by its music, by a score whose shifts set the tone of the series: funky, ironic, melancholic, tragic. This may be a boxing show, but it stirs memories of *Cowboy Bebop* and *Samurai Champloo*, of Yamamoto's crime show *Michiko and Hatchin*, and the hyper-homoeroticism of her *Yuri on Ice*!!! The main adversary in *Megalobox* is even called Yuri.

It's also a "future sports" show, where boxing has gone cyber. Don't get us wrong. Boxing is still two guys in a ring, with the screaming crowds, the trash-talking and jaw-socking, the blood and saliva and mouthguards sent flying. But this is a future where robotics are part of the sport, where boxers become cyborgs. Some fighters have metal rigs strapped to their arms and shoulders, pistons driving their blows faster and harder, a vision of hi-tech steroids gone legal. Other fighters go for deeper cuts. They really *are* cyborgs, with metal muscles and skin integrated with flesh and bone.

The underdog in this show is called – fittingly enough – Junk Dog. He's a

member of this world's underclass, an outsider charging round the badlands on his motorbike, without the ID documents to be a "citizen" of society. (British viewers will think of recent headlines.) This blocks him from entering Megalonia, the world's most prestigious boxing tournament. Instead, Junk Dog prostitutes his talents in the same way that struggling boxers have done since antiquity. He throws fights. His burly trainer Nanbu – and that's another type who's been around forever – fixes matches for the local crime bosses. Junk Dog takes nightly dives, while his gullible fans are fleeced.

That's until our hero, riding his trusty motorbike, has a near-fatal collision with a woman and a cyborg boxer. The incident leads to an angry face-off, and later a sensational surprise match between Junk Dog and the cyborg. The combatant is Yuri, world-champion of megaloboxing. Junk Dog loses, but the fight triggers him; he refuses to be a fall guy any more. There's blowback from the match-fixing mobsters, of course, and Nanbu frantically gambles their lives on the impossible – that Junk Dog can not only enter the Megalonia tournament but that he can *win* it.

Of course, the fights are *Megalobox*'s big draw. They're brutal and bloody, sometimes lightning-quick, sometimes gruelling and ugly, booed by the crowd. But the anime is just as effective – and perhaps more – at depicting the punch drunk limbos of the battered boxer, far scarier than mere violence. Dog sits in a dead-eyed stupor between rounds; or he lies broken on the floor of the ring, being counted up to oblivion. Anime, especially sports anime, have always distorted space and time. Memo to



Roboboxers

Later in the series, our hero controversially opts to fight without the robotic parts (called Gears) which have become mainstream in the sport. However, in the episodes we've seen, there's no suggestion that robotised boxing is any less valid. You might link this attitude to Japan's heritage of cyborg heroes and robot pilots in fiction, and how the real country rebuilt itself with technology after the war. You might even think about the arguments that rage now about transgender boxers and athletes.

Road Safety

In the first episode, a scene where Junk Dog's motorbike nearly hits a stranger – who turns out to be the female head of the Megalonia tournament – has obvious echoes of an early scene in *Akira* when the boy Tetsuo has a similar accident. *Megalobox* is made by TMS Entertainment, descended from the famous Tokyo Movie Shinsha studio which animated *Akira*. Come to think of it, the tearaway kids in *Megalobox*'s world pop red "candy" pills, rather like *Akira*'s biker gangs...

1. The relationship between trainer and boxer isn't always smooth. 2. A geared-up Junk Dog, before he gets a new identity as "Gearless Joe." 3. Naturally, Joe's a great brawler outside the ring.

Interstellar director Christopher Nolan: black holes do nothing to you that a brutal boxing match won't do just as well.

MY NAME IS JOE

By the end of the second episode, Dog has found a way to enter the Megalonia tournament. He's also taken on a new name – Joe. For most western fans, it's just a name. For Japanese viewers, though, it's a link to a classic long past. Like *GeGeGe no Kitaro* last issue, *Megalobox* is a show that's tied to one of the most important manga and anime epics you've probably never heard of.

Tomorrow's Joe (often referred to by its Japanese title, *Ashita no Joe*), was a massively popular boxing manga by Asao Takamori (writer) and Tetsuya Chiba (artist). The strip ran from 1968 to 1973, collected in 20 volumes. There were also two TV anime series directed by Osamu Dezaki (*Rose of Versailles*). Years before Hollywood's *Rocky*, Joe's saga of an underdog boxer became a national icon, linked to Japan's own post-war journey from ruin to rebirth. Neither the manga nor the anime were ever translated into English, probably due to their age and the unpopularity of sports stories in Anglophone territories.

Megalobox is being officially marketed as a half-century anniversary tribute to *Tomorrow's Joe*. Its cool *Bebop* trappings rub shoulders with old-school character designs – the trainer Nanbu just looks timeless, while a little-boy character who turns up later could have stepped from a kids' anime from 40 years ago. *Megalobox* can't strike the national zeitgeist like the earlier *Joe* did, but in the current anime season, it's a contender for champion. ●



BASEBALL CONNECTION

Tomorrow's Joe is arguably the most iconic manga written by Asao Takamori (real name Asaki Takamori), but he wrote other famous works. *Star of the Giants*, published from 1966, was about the "Yomiuri Giants" baseball team. Its anime adaptation in 1968 was the first sports anime ever. *Tiger Mask* (manga 1968, anime 1969) had a hero wrestler. The two series were illustrated by different artists from Tetsuya Chiba, who drew *Tomorrow's Joe*. Chiba is still alive today, but Takamori died in 1987.

TOKYO 1964 VS TOKYO 2020

Adam Miller on post-war Japan and the Olympic boom

IT GOES WITHOUT saying that postwar Japan was a tumultuous place to be. The country had just lost a war, been the first victim of two nuclear bombings, were occupied by the Allied forces for a decade, had their constitution rewritten, waved goodbye to imperialism, and had to shift their national identity to fit into the emerging globalist society.

Once Japan's occupation ended in the mid-1950s, the country dragged its populace into self-dependency through a national surge in investing in infrastructure. Train lines sprouted up, crisscrossing the country, highways began connecting communities, and cities expanded at incredible speeds. All this employed a nation, filling the society with expendable income, creating a market hungry for cool new gadgets and trinkets, which domestic entrepreneurs were only too happy to provide.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

In 2007, Shigeru T. Otsubo of Nagoya University wrote a paper called "Post-war Development of the Japanese Economy: Development, Japanese/Asian Style." In this report, Otsubo refers to Japan's sudden recovery as the "Miracle Recovery", which was made possible by what was labeled macroeconomic development, which saw to support the working and middle classes, and inject some much needed finances into the mass population.

Counter intuitively, there were a few pros to Japan's defeat and occupation by western forces. Mainly it gave the country a unified goal to attain, namely to catch up with the progressive western societies of Europe and North America. Unfortunately, there were very few savings left in the average household, so casual consumerism seemed like an unattainable goal. But among other tactics, the Japanese government bought huge plots of land from "absentee landlords" and sold it off very cheaply to independent smallholders, creating a wave of self-employed farmers. To this day you can see rice farmers carving out a living pretty much anywhere; even the roads from Narita airport to central Tokyo are lined with rice paddies.

Another clever idea was the "Priority Production Strategy" which focused on key industries such as steel and coal mining, as well as train and boat construction. This selective strategy worked wonders and according to

Otsubo: "Industrial production rapidly recovered from 31% of the pre-war level in January 1947 to 80% of that level, in April 1949."

In just two decades, Japan had not only thrown off the shackles of defeat, but had thrived to become one of the world's most successful economies, a goal they achieved through innovative inventions, clever constructions, and political gambles that actually paid off.

SYMBOLIC OLYMPICS

The 1964 Olympics were in many ways a symbol of Japan's renewed strength, an opportunity to showcase their stability to the world, and a reassuring nod to its citizens that they had successfully navigated rough waters and were now sailing easy.

Perhaps the most symbolic figure of the event was Olympic torchbearer Yoshinori Sakai, who was born in Hiroshima the day the bomb fell. He was officially registered as a hibakusha (an atomic bomb victim) and therefore guaranteed medical assistance for life, but he was not a weak and feeble figure. As a strong young man with a bright future ahead of him, he represented someone who had not forgotten his past, but was no longer defined by it. Japan was keen to move on from their recent history and this torchbearer was a key step in moving forward.

TRUE VICTORS

Japan entered 294 male and 61 female athletes, roughly twice as many as participated in the previous Olympic Games held in Rome. Judo and volleyball were entered into the roster, and Japan excelled in both. The women's volleyball team walked away with the gold medal, beating the Soviet team 3-0 in the final, which according to Japanese Olympic Committee, reached a staggering 85% TV viewing rate when it was broadcast live.

Japan's final tally of medals was 16 gold, 5 silver, and 8 bronze, which ranked them third overall in the games, behind the United States in first place and the Soviet Union in second. Japan had successfully reentered the global conversation: not as a victim, but as a victor.

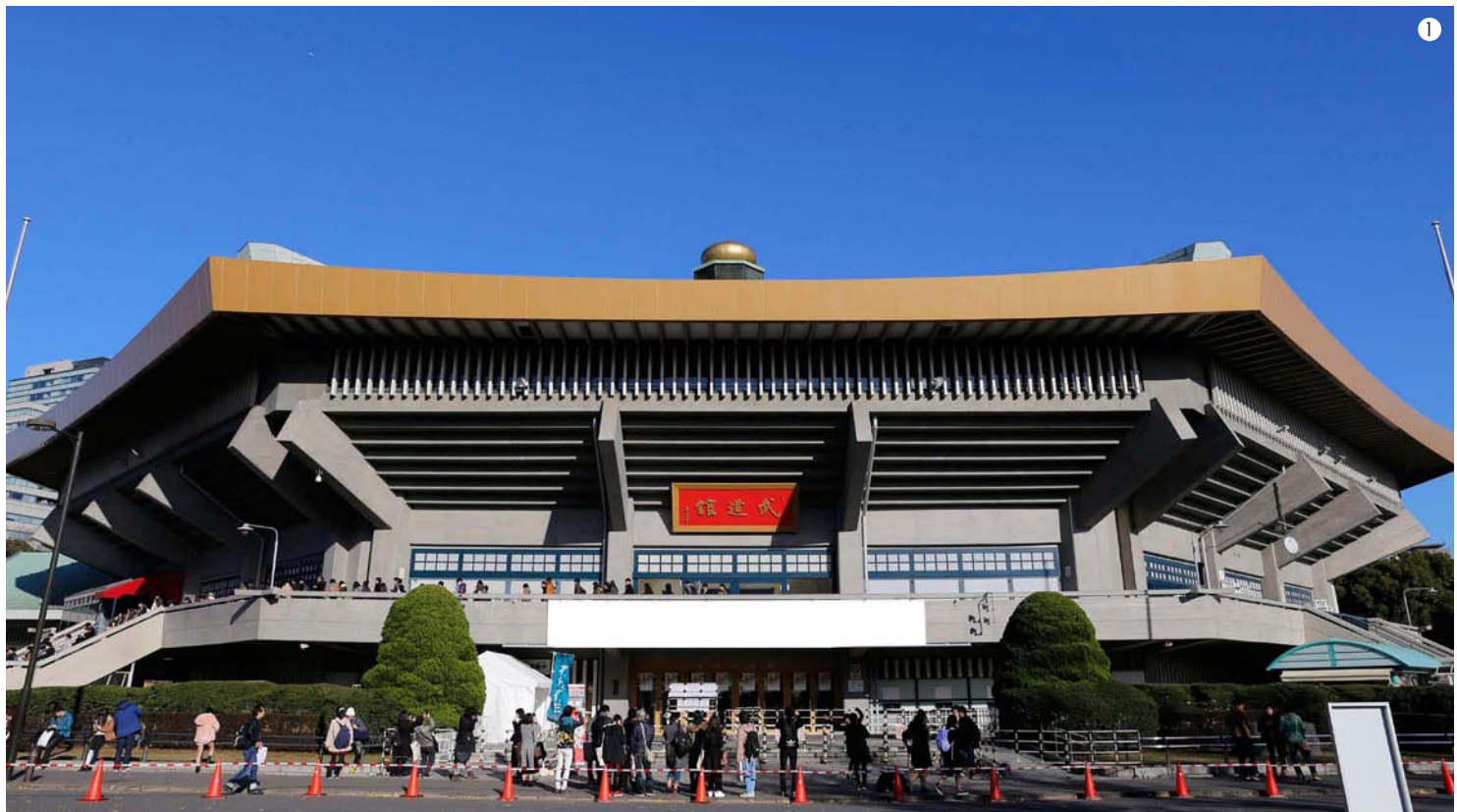
TOKYO 2020

Whilst the Tokyo 2020 Olympics may not have as much gravitas behind it as the truly symbolic 1964 games, everyone in Japan is teeming with excitement.

Across Tokyo (and beyond!) venues are approaching readiness, sponsors are already emptying their pockets, but most importantly... the mascots have been decided upon. It wouldn't be the Olympics without a good mascot or two, would it?! The Olympic Committee originally had 2042 entries for the design to select from, and asked pupils from 16,769 schools to cast their votes on their favourite. Ryo Taniguchi, who was born in Fukuoka in 1974 and studied art at the Cabrillo College in California, created the winning designs. At the time of writing, the names have yet to be decided, but they might as well call them cash-cow A and B, as they are sure to make a ton of money!

Ryohei Miyata, chair of the mascot selection panel, stated, "The children selected two mascots that embody both ancient tradition and new innovation." Could there be a better way to celebrate Japan's global reputation? ●

"IN JUST TWO DECADES, JAPAN HAD NOT ONLY THROWN OFF THE SHACKLES OF DEFEAT, BUT HAD THRIVED TO BECOME ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIES, A GOAL THEY ACHIEVED THROUGH INNOVATIVE INVENTIONS, CLEVER CONSTRUCTIONS AND POLITICAL GAMBLERS THAT ACTUALLY PAID OFF."



1



2



3

1. Nippon Budokan was originally built for the judo competition at the 1964 Olympics. It's gone on to host scores of musical acts including The Beatles, Scandal and even Hatsune Miku. 2. Tokyo Big Sight will host the press for the event. 3. Sapporo Dome will be a football venue at the 2020 Olympics. 4. Yoshinori Sakai holding the Olympic torch in 1964. 5. The as yet unnamed Olympic mascots!



4



5

MANGA SCHOOL
With Tan Hui Tian

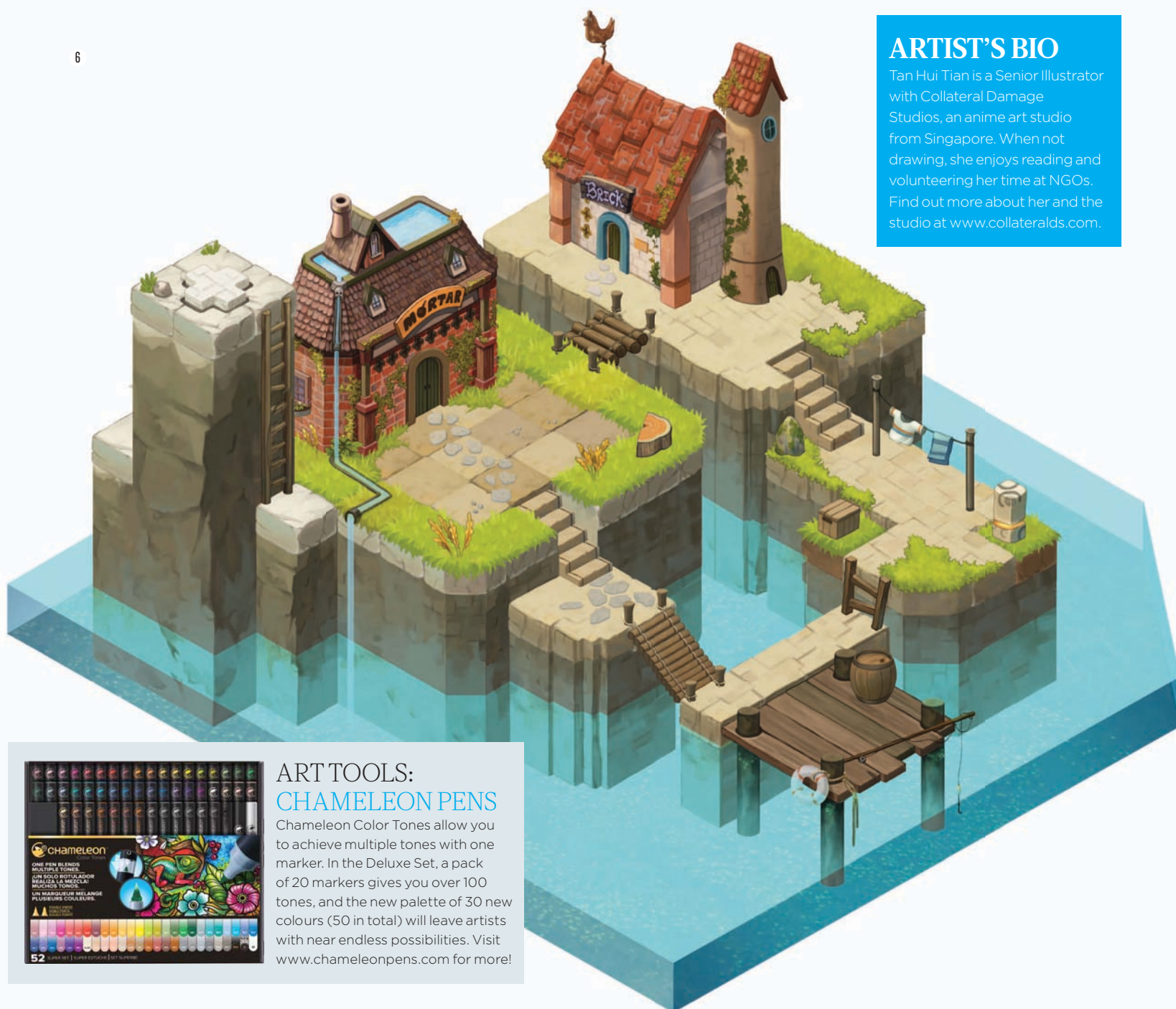
ISOMETRIC ENVIRONMENT

EVER WANTED TO SEE HOW IN-GAME ISOMETRIC ART IS CREATED? WE SHOW YOU HOW WITH COLLATERAL DAMAGE STUDIOS' SENIOR ILLUSTRATOR TAN HUI TIAN. THIS TUTORIAL SHOWS YOU HOW THE INDIVIDUAL LAYERS ARE CREATED – CAST SHADOWS CAN BE ADDED IN LATER IN THE GAME ENGINE.

6

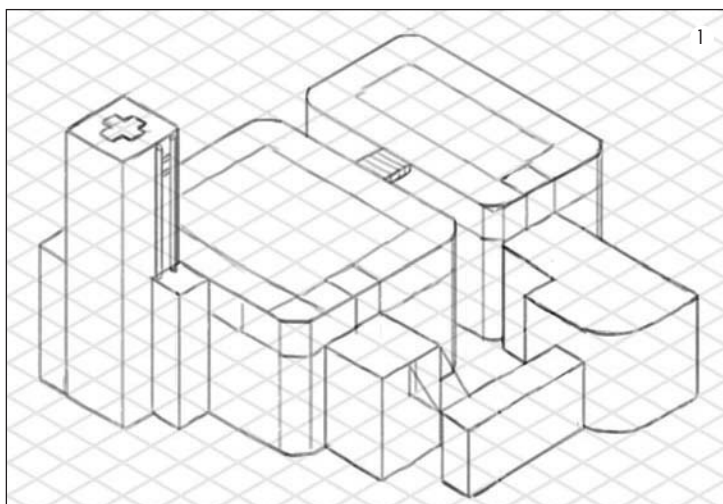
ARTIST'S BIO

Tan Hui Tian is a Senior Illustrator with Collateral Damage Studios, an anime art studio from Singapore. When not drawing, she enjoys reading and volunteering her time at NGOs. Find out more about her and the studio at www.collateralds.com.



ART TOOLS: CHAMELEON PENS

Chameleon Color Tones allow you to achieve multiple tones with one marker. In the Deluxe Set, a pack of 20 markers gives you over 100 tones, and the new palette of 30 new colours (50 in total) will leave artists with near endless possibilities. Visit www.chameleonpens.com for more!



1. PLACE WITH PURPOSE

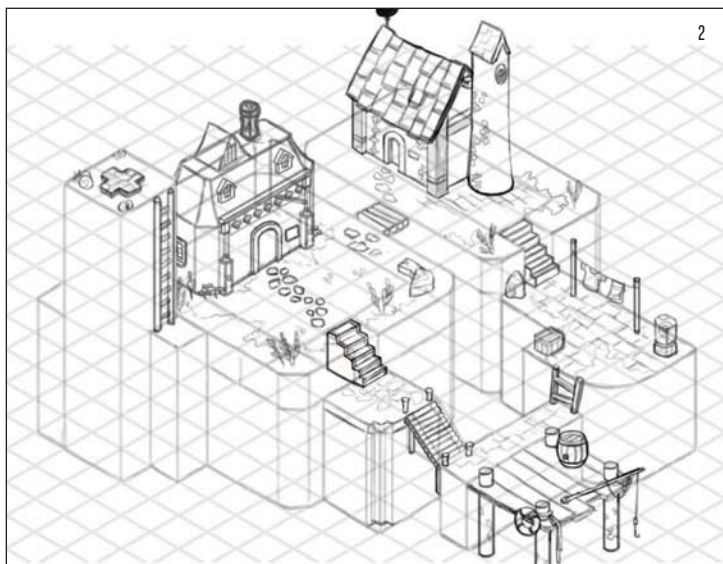
Draft out a 'stage' based on the isometric grid. Make sure that the pathways make sense. Have some variety in the shapes and proportions of the platforms. Think of a purpose or a concept for the 'stage'. This particular 'stage' is meant to be a waystation by boat, and has a save point.

2. POPULATE THE STAGE

Populate the 'stage' with a sketch of all the various objects. Make sure that the doors, windows, stairs, etc are proportionate to your character sprites. You should make sure that certain objects, like stairs or textures, are made to be tileable or repeatable. This means drawing windows on a separate layer, for instance. The sketch can be rough, as you can add details easily later on.

3. DELICATE TOUCH

After lining the sketch, inverse-select the space outside of it and apply flat colours. Then, cell-shade the objects with a consistent light source. Using a brush with transparency, add in further details. Make sure that the overall values are correct even after adding details, by not being too heavy-handed.



4. TINKER AS YOU GO

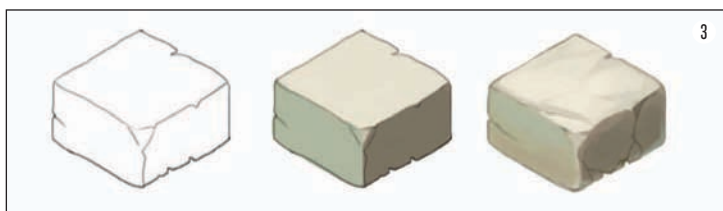
I made some adjustments to the sketch along the way. For instance, moving the chimney on the red brickhouse to where it would make sense. Don't be afraid to adjust things as you go along. I prefer working at the artwork in a patchwork manner, so I can derive some satisfaction from completion of smaller parts of the whole.

5. DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

A huge component of making a work look finished is in the detailing. I do the details on a separate layer so I can always adjust the asset as needed. Close up, the detailing is just a bunch of simple strokes.

6. FINISHED PRODUCT

I add in the surrounding sea for context. The waves will be animated on a separate layer, as well as any other moving parts (like the stream of water from the building or the weather vane). It's always nice to have some movement planned in advance so that the game can feel more alive. If you're creating an image for marketing materials, this is the stage where you could add in the cast shadow and refine the lighting further.





[ANIME REVIEW]

LUPIN THE THIRD PART 4

The Italian Job

OUT NOW // ANIME LIMITED // 15 // CRIME, ACTION, COMEDY // £69.99 (COLLECTOR'S BLU-RAY) // 590 MINS // 26 EPISODES (INCLUDING 2 OVA EPISODES)

PLOT Genius thief Lupin, his allies Jigen and Goemon and his female frenemy Fujiko have landed up in Italy, chased by obsessed cop Zenigata. Lupin gets a new wife (!) and a conspiracy to unravel, involving something called the Dream of Italy...

As we've said elsewhere this issue (page 030), we're assuming most NEO readers know Lupin already. But if you haven't encountered the mad master thief before, you'll be wondering if this glossy 2015 TV series is the best place to start. And in all honesty, it isn't.

True, this is no mind scrambling *Avengers: Infinity War*. The *Lupin* franchise has just five continuing characters, who are well introduced in the new show's brilliantly swaggering opening titles. Nonetheless, the first episodes of the series do seem to assume that you know how these "old" characters relate to each other, their chemistry. Frankly, *Lupin's* best starting point remains the *Castle of Cagliostro* film from 1979, directed by a pre-Ghibli Miyazaki on top form, available on Blu-ray, DVD and Netflix.

Lupin Part 4 includes many visual callbacks to *Cagliostro*, not least the European setting. Most episodes of this series have Lupin's globetrotting gang roaming round either Italy

or the enclosed mountain micro-state of San Marino (it's real). There are verdant rural backdrops, steep winding roads, stone churches and mansions. Very unusually, the show was broadcast in Italy *before* it was shown in Japan. We caught a seemingly big slip – one episode features a hospital with the kind of sliding door that (we suspect) is far more characteristic of Japan's buildings than Italy's. Then again, the episode in question, which foregrounds the gunman Jigen, is an homage to spaghetti Westerns, which were all about doubling one country's scenery for another's.

Many episodes are stand-alone adventures, some very good. Even the silly ones are often elevated by nimble, witty storytelling and sometimes by surprise extra twists that give the foregoing flimflam a humane point (though there are also a few disappointing endings). On top of that, the series has an "arc" storyline that's great fun. It has echoes of an old *Lupin* movie, *Secret of Mamo*, but it also feels like the writers had read Dan Brown (the arc plot makes inspired use of great Italian paintings) and decided his conspiracies weren't crazy enough.

Tonally, the show is a medley of the multiple versions of Lupin over the decades. Part One starts in gentle, *Cagliostro* mode, with Lupin – shock horror! – actually getting hitched in San Marino, to a seemingly airheaded playgirl called Rebecca Rossellini. But Rebecca turns out to be a spirit as slyly anarchic as Lupin himself, and she sends him running round battlements and skydiving down bottomless cliffs, with all the realism of Bugs Bunny. Some later episodes of the series are equally wacky. Others are hardboiled action, with meaty

EXTRAS

For complex reason, the Collector's Blu-ray edition that's now available is subtitled only. A standard Blu-ray edition will be available from the AllTheAnime site at a later date (tbc), dubbed-only. If you've already bought the Collector's Edition, the standard version will cost only £10. The Collector's Edition also includes a 60-page art book, with sections on props, gadgets and concept art.



fistfights and torture, as if written for Daniel Craig's Bond.

So it's a good thing Craig's Bond is in the series, or at last there's a lookalike British agent who's so close that it makes no difference. (This show was made three years after *Skyfall*). Okay, so this Bond-ish character is called Nyx, and he isn't *quite* 007. He has freaky *X-Men* fighting abilities, and is a devoted family man in the Liam Neeson-*Taken* mould. But Nyx has enough of Craig's humanity to be more than a (very funny) genre joke – the Lupin character was originally inspired by Bond himself. The series is less kind to Nyx's MI6 paymasters, murderous monsters like Russia's secret agents in the old Bond books.

"THE BOLD FRAME-FILLING CHARACTERS ARE VERY TRUE TO LUPIN TRADITIONS... CLEFT CHINS, HAIRY HANDS AND KOOKY, UGLY SUPPORT CHARACTERS."

Nyx is part of the arc storyline, like Rebecca, who becomes considerably more interesting as the show continues. But this isn't the female-driven subversion of *The Woman Called Fujiko Mine*. At heart, Rebecca's story is much like the old-fashioned, trickster white-knight romance of *Cagliostro*, though that means that it shares the same undeniable charm. More

provocative is one stand-alone episode, *Until the Full Moon Passes*, which takes on male saviours and gender politics.

The series looks mostly marvellous, its bold frame-filling characters true to Lupin traditions. Cleft chins, hairy hands and kooky, ugly support characters (men and women) lend an unplugged, retro edge to the visuals. The characters have a cut-out, jagged quality, nothing like the liquid art of Kyoto Animation, but it's easy to enjoy. A late episode, about a stolen car, is weakly drawn (perhaps due to production outsourcing) but again, the end of the story saves it. The weakest episodes are three flagging middle instalments, coming just after a terrific *Mona Lisa* caper. They sag the show badly, but the following episodes get back on track.

In 1980, only a year after he made *Cagliostro*, Miyazaki wrote an essay called *Lupin Was Truly a Creature of His Era*, reprinted in the book *Starting Point*. Miyazaki claimed Lupin was "expiring into the world of anachronistic, nonsensical comedy shows that hold appeal mainly for the gap between the (original) story and the era in which they are shown." Some pundits say much the same of Bond films. Yet Lupin has embraced this state with the zeal of a stand-up comic. He stays alive through crowd-pleasing antics and his persona's charisma, but also through sharp observations, pleasing tale-telling and – both in *Cagliostro* and in this new incarnation – a fundamentally good heart.

Despite unevenness and a serious mid-series sag, this has more than enough great episodes to be an outstanding *Lupin*. ●
 ☆☆☆☆

ZOMBIE!

One of the OAV episodes included on the set is a spoof of zombie movies. While zombies can pop up anywhere these days, we like to think this episode reflects the Italian setting – Italy churned out numerous memorable zombie films in the 1970s and 1980s, some of which ended up on Britain's infamous list of "video nasty" banned films.

それ
“it”こそが今、読みたいもの。

COMIC

it

【コミック イット】

vol.25 | 2018
February

[<http://comic-it.jp/>]

Cover Illustration Gin Shirakawa

物語に込め

心からの

感謝の印を

We send
our special love
to you!

1 本格派オトナ女子のコミック



THE DIGITAL DRIFT

It was the 2011 Fukushima earthquake that pushed many Japanese publishers over the edge into digital publishing. With paper either unavailable or hard to transport around the country, they took the leap. Some stayed, others swiftly returned to good old paper as soon as they could.

MANGA SNAPSHOT

COMIC IT

Jonathan Clements on a mag that is turning into a butterfly

ISSUE #25 // DEBUT YEAR: 2015 // PAGE COUNT: C.350 // PUBLISHER: KADOKAWA // PRICE: 500 YEN (£3.30) // CYCLE: MONTHLY

“WE SEND OUR special love to you,” says the cover of the final issue of *Comic It* (1) magazine, a title for the adult female fan that is shutting down after three years’ service. Regular readers of this column will know that it gets just as excited about magazines shutting down as starting up, as it gives us an excellent chance to get to grips with the realities of the magazine business.

One commenter on Anime News Network harrumphed that it only went to show that there were more male fans than females, immediately assuming that *Comic It* was ceasing publication through lack of interest. And while I am prepared to consider that knee-jerk reaction, it’s actually the least likely explanation for some fiscal brinkmanship by smart managers who know how to play the system.

First things first, *Comic It* is not “shutting down”. It’s just shedding its paper incarnation and migrating to the web. Eighteen years ago, when the publisher of *Manga Max* magazine really did shut it down, the promise of an online version was an overly-optimistic fudge, shoved into the final issue over my protests as the departing editor. I refused to have anything to do with a notional digital version, but I am not sure that anyone at the company really wanted to do one anyway. It was just a handy gesture of hope to make people think that the magazine hadn’t just been cancelled. But this final physical issue of *Comic It* seems determined to push the digital version, ending each and every manga story with a QR code that will take readers directly to the online continuation.

In fact, *Comic It* is so keen to stress that it is merely transforming, like a butterfly, that its cover in this “final” issue pushes the first chapter of a story that will be continued online. A brave move all round, from the editors to the creator – is this the kiss of death for a good story; or is this story good enough to lure readers into the Web like a cybernetic Pied Piper?

Gin Shirakawa’s *Life at 50cm* (2) is a fitting topic in such a situation, a manga suffused with notions of changing times and experimental adaptation strategies. Its protagonists are a pair of stray tomcats, Nanao and Machi, whose feline world has been disrupted by a mysterious drop in resources – there’s less human trash for them to pick through. As this crisis threatens the hard-fought equilibrium of cat-domains all over town, Nanao and Machi take to trying it on with a new human female

target, public bath manager Yoshino Narita.

Shirakawa’s cat story comes with hidden depths. Nanao, for example, sports a collar that implies he has a backstory with a human owner. Public baths are falling out of favour and shutting down all over Japan because, you know, modern houses have bathrooms. What’s a nice girl like Yoshino doing mopping the floors in a dead-end flophouse? The result is a compelling workplace drama about a dying industry, intriguingly told from the point of view not of the quirky cast of misfits on the job, but from the animals on the sidelines – an entire wainscot society of disdainful, self-interested creatures that couldn’t care less about the mortgage or the dating scene, as long as there’s some tuna in the bins.

The publishers at Kadokawa aren’t idiots. They have always demonstrated an incisive grasp of the otaku market, and I can’t help but wonder if this is all part of their long-term cultivation of the women’s market. There are a *lot* of female manga fans in Japan, but the active ones are more usually doers than readers, getting their fingers dirty drawing and printing their own comics.

Notably, a bunch of the manga running in *It* themselves were rescues from the earlier Media Works publication *Comic Sylph* (covered in NEO 126). Media Works was assimilated by Kadokawa in 2013 and *Sylph* was cancelled last year, making me immediately suspect that a number of the transfers were clever ways of negotiating contracts – well, Mr Matsumoto, we’re shutting the magazine down, which ends our obligation to pay you on *those* terms, but if you want to keep publishing your story in our new magazine, let’s talk.... Is this a case of another paradigm shift?

SCOOPS & DUPES

What we need is a zealous investigative journalist to dig deep into all this accountancy. Someone like Shuji Watanabe, the protagonist of Kisei Tada’s ongoing *The Soft Angle* (3). Shuji is desperate for a scoop to keep him in favour at the *Monthly Brewster* rag and he thinks he’s got it in the form of a 12-year-old cold case about a hotel fire. He’s tracing the activities and contacts of Makoto Tanisumi, a teenage orphan whose survival of the fire as a child seems to have made her the subject of worship by a sinister religious cult. True to many a thriller in modern Japan, Tada >>>

**FREETER LIVE**

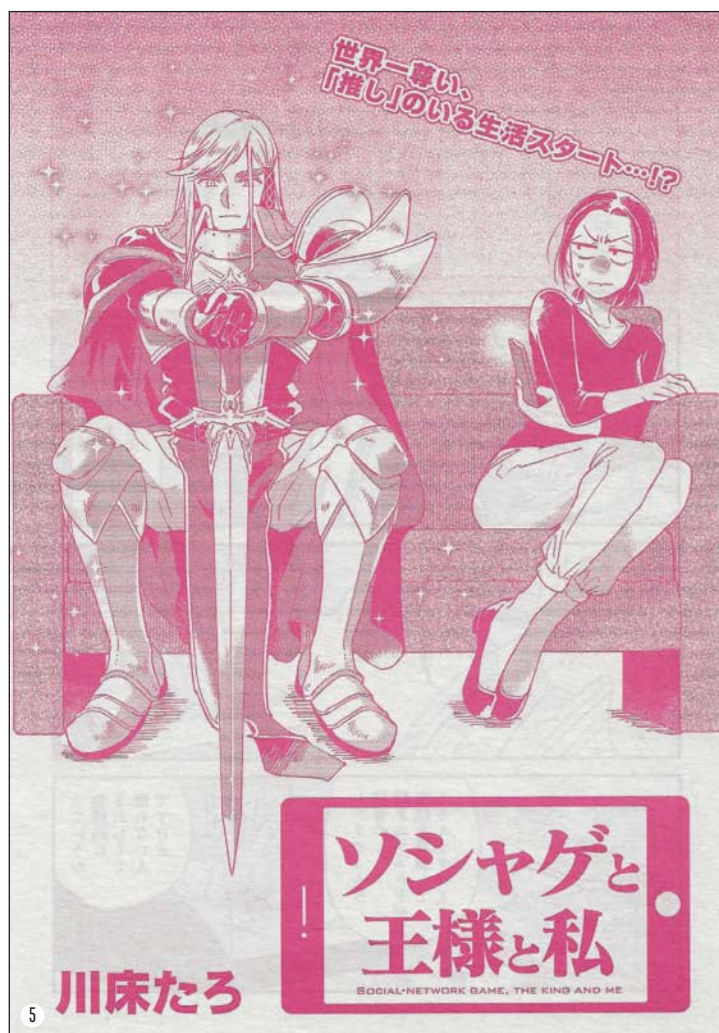
A freeter in modern Japanese slang is a drop-out from the rat-race who prefers to earn just enough to pay for their chosen lifestyle. The phenomenon combines traditional teen apathy with a Millennial revolt against definitions of wealth and success that have taken a heavy toll on previous generations of Japanese.

>>> needs to push back into the past, to a time when social media metadata wouldn't solve half the cases before they got started, but he also posits a question of appropriation and chauvinism: is Makoto merely being exploited by a cult, or is her tragic life being exploited far more by a cynical journalist who just wants to be able to stick her pretty face on a cover underneath a lurid headline?

Speaking of rabbit holes, which we sort-of were, in Hansode's *White Garden* (4), a half-Japanese boy goes to visit the family of his dear departed English mother. Instead he finds a haunting, and possibly haunted garden, where the smell of white roses leads him to a hidden tunnel. He encounters a handsome young man called Usagi (Rabbit), who seems to want him to meet a girl called Alice. But that was Rui's mother's name...!

Past and future mix in a surreal, post-modern retelling of *Alice in Wonderland*, which like *Life at 50cm*, is told almost entirely from the side lines, as if the reader herself is a wallflower looking in on a bigger, flashier story. Hansode's artwork is deceptively simple, largely discarding any interest in British exotica, fantasy or even the garden itself, in favour of close ups on the faces and emotional lives of the characters. The opening panel says it all – Rui leaning dolefully against the wall, the view of the titular garden outside the window entirely left blank.

Post-modernism returns in *Social Network Game: The King and I* (5) by Taro Kawayuka, in which manga magazine editor Ako Katayori suddenly finds herself lumbered with a new room-mate – Herculee, the royal knight who was previously her avatar in an online game. *The King and I* takes the old magical-girlfriend cliché set-up and reverses it for exactly the kind of reader that we might presume transferred to *It* from *Sylph* – manga-loving editorial types with a passion for online gaming. We've seen such set-ups before (the US version of *Queer as Folk* had a memorable episode



"COMIC IT IS SO KEEN TO STRESS THAT IT IS MERELY TRANSFORMING, LIKE A BUTTERFLY, THAT ITS COVER IN THIS "FINAL" ISSUE PUSHES THE FIRST CHAPTER OF A STORY THAT WILL BE CONTINUED ONLINE. A BRAVE MOVE ALL ROUND."

as early as 2005 in which a character was haunted by the avatar he used on a dating app), but *The King and I* is a charming comedy about a preoccupied yuppie girl who suddenly acquires a... well, a gaijin boyfriend. Herculee can barely pronounce her name, but he strides through the Japanese suburbs like a barrel-chested Chris Hemsworth, charming the ladies in the laundromat and foraging for groceries. But is he too good to be true? The only glimpse we get of the real men in Ako's life is of Tagami, her portly, nerdy co-worker – is Herculee a fantasy delusion, or a far, far better bet than the real thing?

Pachinko Operative A Cannot Be an Idol (6) by Natsumi Ito juxtaposes two common themes in adult manga – the glittering world of celebrity and stardom, and the everyday world of the



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MEET AGGRETSUKO

Emily Valentine delves into the world of office drama with Sanrio's latest star

MEET AGGRETSUKO, A 25-year-old red panda with a passion for death metal karaoke and a strong dislike for her office job at a Tokyo trading firm. The brain child of Japanese super-brand Sanrio and the star of her own Netflix series, Aggretsuko fuses all the kawaii of Hello Kitty with the grim reality of adult life. This is a series that will appeal to anyone who likes a bit of edge with their cute.

After five years in the same job, mild mannered Aggretsuko finds herself getting increasingly enraged by her role as the office doormat. After a hard day at work she enjoys nothing more than heading to the local karaoke bar to belt out some death metal anthems and let off some serious steam.

This first series follows Aggretsuko as she tries to muddle her way through the minefield of office life. She's the anime embodiment of many issues women face in the workplace, from dealing with a sexist male boss and bitchy co-

workers to developing an office crush and suffering cringeworthy wardrobe malfunctions.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to Aggretsuko's work happiness is her boss Ton. He harbours a strong dislike for office wallflowers and prefers to surround himself with colleagues who shower him with flattery. In an attempt to find some common ground, Aggretsuko embarks on a hilarious yet painful journey of discovery, helped and hindered along the way by her various work associates.

The colourful array of familiar office characters make the whole series just about as relatable as it can get. If you've ever worked in an office you'll probably recognise a few yourself, from power dressing senior female bosses, to the colleague who just loves to delegate work Aggretsuko's way.



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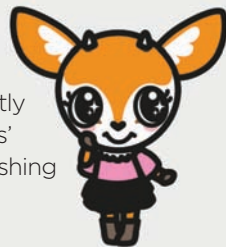
INSIDE THE WORLD OF AGGRETSUKO

Meet the work colleagues making life a misery...



Senior boss Ton is usually in a bad mood and likes to bark orders at his staff while he plays golf in his office. Occasionally he'll let his guard down and show a more pleasant side, but it often doesn't last for long...

Ditzy on the outside but wily on the inside, Tsunoda knows exactly what to do to stay on her bosses' good side, and is often found dishing out fake flattery for an easy life.



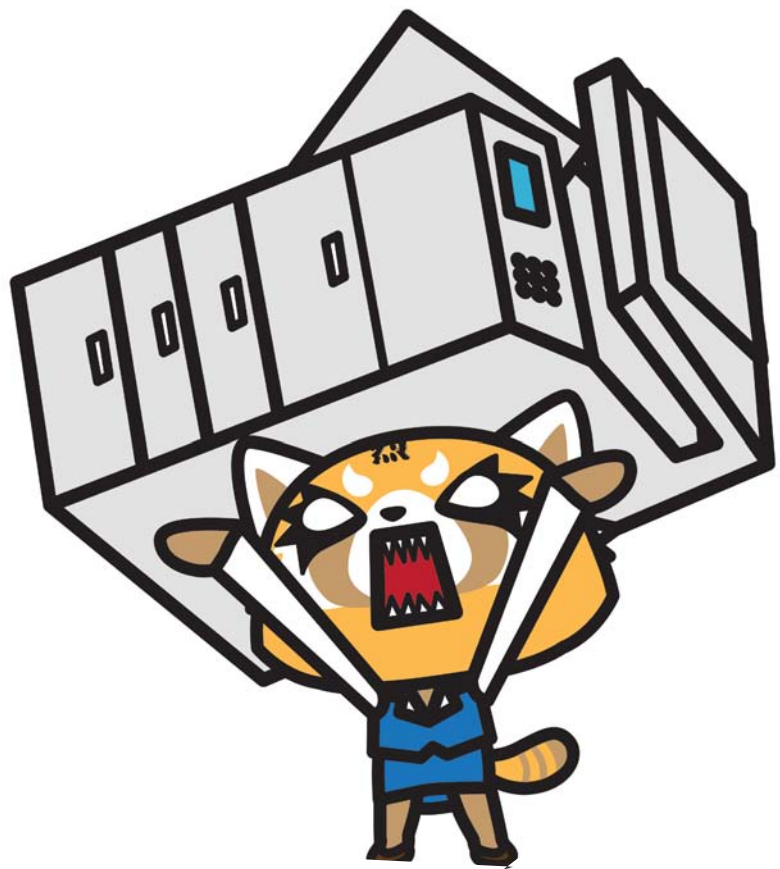
Female bosses Washimi and Gori sashay down the office corridors with confidence and seem intimidating to Aggretsuko at first. But it's not long before they've shown her a softer side, taken her under their wing and are on hand to offer some sound life advice.

Fenneko is opinionated and straight talking but one of Aggretsuko's closest office allies. She enjoys venting her frustrations and stalking her colleague's social media accounts.



Haida has a pretty big crush on Aggretsuko and goes out of his way to help her out when she needs it. He's a genuinely nice guy but she doesn't see him as a love interest. So sad!

Aggretsuko often finds it hard to say no when her team colleague Tsubone piles huge amounts of work on top of her. And when she does stand up to her... let's just say it doesn't end well.



AGGRETSUKO SPEAKS!

We caught up with Aggretsuko herself to get the inside scoop

Hi Aggretsuko! Office life can be tough at times. What are the biggest challenges you've faced at work?

Nothing makes sense in this world and there are lots of unfair things. But the biggest challenge is when I got tired of work and just wanted to quit my job, my boss found out and he talked me out of it with a logical argument.

Tell us a bit about your Boss Ton's management style and what positive changes you think he could make?

I want to say... He is old fashioned, not very respectful of women, thinks female workers are only good for serving tea, is moody every day, loads work on me when he goes drinking... So I don't think he can make any positive changes!!! But he does have another side where he cares about his staff members.

But it's not all bad. What do you enjoy most about office life?

Delivering documents to male workers who are my type, and I make up good reasons to do so!

Your female colleagues Washimi and Gori give you lots of support with your work and love life. What's some of the most useful advice they've given you?

Once I tried really hard to act like a "good girl" because I was afraid that a guy didn't like me. Washimi san advised me "You can act however you want to in your love life, but only if you believe in the personality you've created and who you say you are". That hit home.

You enjoy letting off some steam with a spot of death metal karaoke. How do you think it's helped you through some tough times?

It helps me feel much better to spit out all the things I cannot say directly - by screaming as if I am summoning a devil from the bottom of hell!

What do you hope the future holds for you?

Marriage, resigning from my job, a happy home and a happy life when I'm old... but I guess the environment won't change unless I become strong!

Season one of Aggretsuko is available to watch now on [netflix.com](https://www.netflix.com) and you can find out more about Aggretsuko and other Sanrio characters at [sanrio.com](https://www.sanrio.com).



NEO ARTIST SHOWCASE

THE BEST IN WESTERN TALENT

EVERY ISSUE, NEO WILL BE FEATURING OUR FAVOURITE WORK
FROM ARTISTS INSPIRED BY ANIME, MANGA AND GAMES



NAME LAURA DAVISON
AGE 19
BASED IN COUNTY DURHAM
PROFESSION GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENT
FAVOURITE GAME ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

BIOGRAPHY

I've been drawing since I was able to hold a pencil. I would always draw animals, particularly horses, whenever I could. I remember watching *Pokémon* on TV when I was young, as well as *Yu-Gi-Oh*, *Dragon Ball Z* and *Sonic X*. Those shows mesmerized me as a kid.

When I was about 7, I was introduced to *Sonic Underground*, and from there I developed a love for the *Sonic The Hedgehog* series. (And this phase has lasted from primary school all the way to now!) I also loved playing *Zelda* games, particularly *Ocarina of Time*. That game is amazing and was a big part of my childhood. I also started drawing human characters more often because of that game. I started taking art more seriously in secondary school, and this is when I discovered anime. I taught myself how to draw in the anime style, and I also learned about anatomy, proportion etc. I then discovered digital art through an amazing book I found at the school library. I started on Windows Paint, and eventually learned how to use Adobe Photoshop. I've been able to develop my own style, and I am glad that others seem to recognize my art.

I am currently studying Graphic Design and I'll soon be progressing onto university to get my foundation degree. I am also working on creating my own original stories for comics. Some of my projects include *Parafernous*, *Lantern Girl*, *First Impressions* and a collaboration project called *Dragon Gem*.

Feel free to visit my DeviantArt (sonicfangirl666.deviantart.com), and YouTube channel (the link is in my DA bio!) to see my art, and watch speed-paints of how I created some of them.

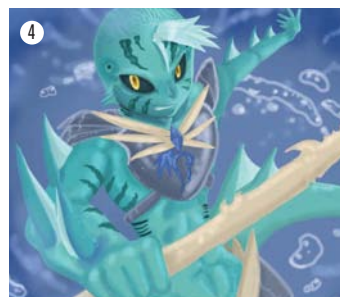


INSPIRATION

I'm heavily inspired by anime, such as *Yu-Gi-Oh*, *Black Butler* and *Ouran High School Host Club*. Video games such as *Zelda*, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, and *Undertale* inspire me too, and I love creating fan art of the characters in those games.



1. First Impressions: Here are the main characters in my *First Impressions* story. I really love this project, and I even made a short comic for it. **2. Dragon Gem:** These are the main characters in *Dragon Gem*. This piece is old now, but I'm still really happy with it. **3. The bus ride gang:** For this piece, I was inspired by my local buses – each character here represents a different bus. These characters are my own designs and I plan on using them in a story or comic. **4. Lapis:** I tried to mimic a soft shading paint style for this piece. This is one of my characters, who is a part of *Dragon Gem*.



NEO WANTS YOU

If you are interested in submitting work to be featured in the NEO ARTIST SHOWCASE, please email mail@neomag.co.uk with 'ARTIST SHOWCASE' as your subject header, along with an internet link with examples of your work.



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*I'm full of
bad ideas*



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TECH CONFUSES ME**



Cat Milk

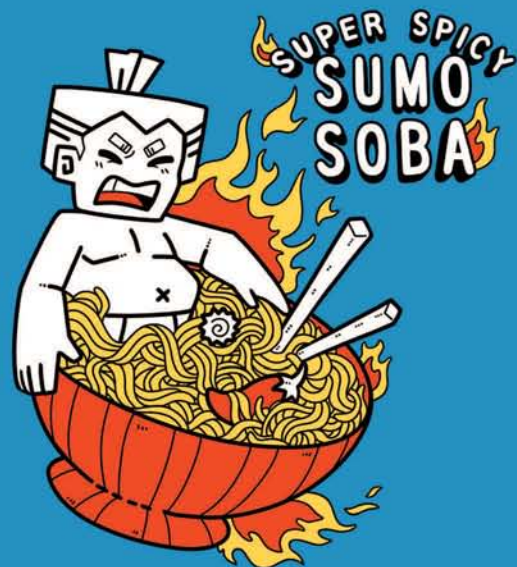
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BRUCE LEE: FACT AND FICTION

Was Bruce Lee's ground-breaking Way Of The Intercepting Fist system inspired by his fight with a rival master, as shown in *Birth Of The Dragon*? NEO's David West examines the evidence.

KUNG FU CINEMA excels at turning men into myths. From the Shaolin rebels Hung Hey-Kwun and Fong Sai-Yuk, to Canton's folk hero Wong Fey-Hung and Wing Chun teacher Ip Man, movies have transformed flesh and blood men into icons of invincibility.

George Nolfi's *Birth Of The Dragon* is the latest in a growing body of biopics about Bruce Lee, alongside Rob Cohen's *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* from 1993, and Manfred Wong's *Young Bruce Lee* from 2010. Nolfi's film has provoked controversy due to accusations of whitewashing as much of the narrative centres not on Lee, but on fictional character Steve McKee (Billy Magnussen) and his attempt to free his love interest Xiulan (Qu Jingjing) from the clutches of the Triads. But perhaps more problematic is the way the film attempts to take the credit for Lee's revolutionary ideas about martial arts and hand it over to Wong Jack Man.

THE CHALLENGE

Played by Yu Xia in the movie, Wong Jack Man is a martial arts instructor who taught Tai Chi, Hsing-Yi and Northern Shaolin before he retired in 2004. In 1964, Lee was living in San Francisco and teaching the Wing Chun style he had learned in Hong Kong. According to his wife Linda in her book *The Bruce Lee Story*, Lee attracted the ire of the local Chinese community for teaching westerners. This led to a challenge match between Lee and Wong Jack Man. In Linda Lee's account, the fight was one-sided in her husband's favour

but afterwards Bruce was unhappy with his performance and this was the start of the process that would eventually lead him to completely change his approach to training, and to formulate his own system which he called Jeet Kune Do, or The Way Of The Intercepting Fist.

Birth Of The Dragon is hardly alone in taking artistic liberties with Lee's life. In *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, the match with Wong is staged in a preposterous arena beneath San Francisco's Chinatown, and then they clash again at a martial arts tournament, which never happened. But *Dragon* barely attempts to conceal its fictitious nature with a plot about Lee being hunted by a demonic giant. However, in *Birth Of The Dragon* [spoiler alert!], Wong Jack Man wins the fight – in fact he has Lee utterly at his mercy but chooses to spare his life. "It was my intention to teach Lee Jun-Fan [Bruce's original Cantonese name]," says Wong afterwards, all humility and wisdom versus Lee's arrogance and aggression.

In the film, the fight is all about the superior martial artist, Wong, using their tussle to open Lee's mind to the limitations of the Wing Chun system. "Technique is a trap, style is a prison," declares Wong. Just watched as a kung fu movie, it's a good fight scene and choreographer Cory Yuen has Phillip Ng, who plays Lee, employ appropriate techniques from Wing Chun – although he also has both Wong and Lee glide through the air. But to credit Wong with opening Lee's mind is disingenuous to say the least.



"GEORGE NOLFI'S *BIRTH OF THE DRAGON* IS THE LATEST IN A GROWING BODY OF BIOPICS ABOUT BRUCE LEE, ALONGSIDE ROB COHEN'S *DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY* FROM 1993, AND MANFRED WONG'S *YOUNG BRUCE LEE* FROM 2010."

THE CLASSICAL MESS

The progression of Lee's thinking on martial arts can be traced through the books and letters he wrote. His first book, *Gung Fu: The Philosophical Art Of Self-Defence* published in 1963, is all based on the Wing Chun style. In 1966, Lee was working on what became the four volumes of *Bruce Lee's Fighting Method*, published after his death alongside a collection of his notes and sketches collected as *The Tao Of Jeet Kune Do*.

Those books show a quantum leap in his thinking as he moved away from traditional martial arts. In a letter written in 1969, Lee told his friend William Cheung, "William, I've lost faith in the Chinese classical arts – though I still call mine Chinese – because basically all styles are products of land swimming, even the Wing Chun school."

The reference to land swimming comes from one of Lee's most important concepts – you can't learn to swim if you never get in the water, and you can't learn to fight without fighting. At a time when kung fu and karate practitioners in the west never engaged in full-contact training or competition, Lee and his students used head gear, shin guards and gloves to spar, and focus mitts, kicking shields, and punch bags to train. Common practice in MMA now, unheard of in the 1960s.

"True refinement seeks simplicity," wrote Lee, who referred to the traditional martial arts as 'the classical mess'. His notes on punching in *The Tao Of Jeet Kune Do* come from the boxing manuals of Edwin Haislet, Jack Dempsey and Thomas Inch, nothing to do with kung fu. It's shameless to suggest that Wong's Northern Shaolin and Tai Chi – the epitome of the flowery, forms-

based classical mess that Lee rejected – should be the inspiration behind Jeet Kune Do, which was geared towards practicality and what Lee called "scientific street fighting."

There are only a handful of eyewitness accounts of the match between Lee and Wong, and one might be forgiven for thinking that Linda's version would inevitably cast her husband in the most favourable light. But it's also true that at the time of their encounter, neither Lee nor Wong was an experienced fighter. Claims that Lee won an amateur boxing tournament in 1958 have never been substantiated, and those much-hyped rooftop scraps of his teenage years – when students from rival kung fu schools tried to beat each other up – are equally impossible to quantify. It's hugely unlikely that the fight with Wong was some titanic tussle worthy of Ali-Frazier and much more likely it was messy, frantic and short-lived.

"Although I can tell you what is not freedom, I cannot tell you what is because that you must discover for yourself," wrote Lee. Only the people who were there know the truth about that fight between Lee and Wong, so while it's impossible to tell the truth about what happened that day, it's equally possible to state what isn't the truth – and that's this film. Judge for yourself – *Birth Of The Dragon* is out now on DVD and Blu-ray from Altitude Film Entertainment. ●

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

During his time in Hong Kong, Bruce Lee's main Wing Chun instructor was Ip's senior student Wong Shun Leung. Wong claimed to have won hundreds of fights held behind closed doors, but on the only occasion he fought in public, in 1957, he was knocked out. Too much land swimming.

The Dragon's Treasure

Bruce Lee's legacy in the martial arts is still the subject of debate. Even now, more than 40 years after his death, there's a split between two of Lee's former top students, Dan Inosanto and Ted Wong, as to which of them teaches the true representation of Jeet Kune Do.

FIVE OF THE BEST MOVIES BY JOHN WOO

Masterpieces of mayhem from the king of heroic bloodshed

WORDS BY DAVID WEST

Last Hurrah For Chivalry

Before he became a director, John Woo worked as an assistant to the great kung fu filmmaker Chang Cheh. 1979's *Last Hurrah For Chivalry* is both a precursor to Woo's heroic bloodshed movies of the 1980s and a clear demonstration of just how much Chang's style influenced his protégé. It's the tale of two swordsmen, Tsing Yi (Damian Lau) and Chang San (Wei Pak), and the debt to Chang is clear in the way female characters are either a nuisance or a distraction, the themes of brotherhood, and the presence of Chang's trademark dance macabre, in which a character is badly wounded but chooses to fight to the death. The swordplay choreography by Fung Hak-On is first rate alongside all the male bonding.



Bullet In The Head

An anomaly in Woo's output, *Bullet In The Head* takes place not in contemporary Hong Kong, but during the Vietnam War. Hoping to make their fortune, three friends Ben (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai), Frank (Jacky Cheung) and Paul (Waise Lee) head to Vietnam to deliver a shipment of contraband to a local gangster. But everything goes horribly wrong and they are forced to make terrible decisions that tear their friendship apart. In addition to the three superb leads there's a splendid performance from Simon Yam as the hitman Luke. There are multiple edits of the film, including one with a ridiculous car chase finale that rather dilutes the impact of Woo's nihilistic vision.



A Better Tomorrow

In the early 1980s, Woo found box office success directing comedies for production studio Cinema City, but he hated the films himself. Everything changed when Woo convinced producer Tsui Hark to let him direct *A Better Tomorrow* in 1986. On paper, Woo chose a strange cast for his gangster epic, with the TV star and matinee idol Chow Yun-Fat, former Shaw Brothers kung fu actor Ti Lung, and Cantopop's Leslie Cheung, but the chemistry between the three of them is what makes the movie so compelling. Waise Lee makes a despicable villain in this tale of washed-up gangsters dragged back to a life of violence – and what spectacular violence it is. Woo's blood-soaked ballet of bullets is still dazzling to behold.



Hard Boiled

Following the bleakness of *Bullet In The Head*, Woo lightened the mood with the 1991 action comedy *Once A Thief*, before returning to his trademark heroic bloodshed style with the jaw-dropping *Hard Boiled*. Tony (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai) is a cop in deep cover within the Triads, torn between loyalty to gang boss Hoi (Kwan Hoi-San) and his assignment. Tequila (Chow Yun-Fat) is a cop determined to bust the Triads, particularly the ruthless Johnny Wong (Anthony Wong), who is out to eliminate Hoi. Building to an insane shootout in a crowded hospital, *Hard Boiled* ranks as one of the greatest action movies of all time, even as it explores Woo's favourite themes of brotherhood and the thin line between policeman and gangster.

The Killer

What separates a cop from a criminal? That's the central question of *The Killer*. Ah Jong (Chow Yun-Fat) is the assassin-for-hire who accepts one final assignment to raise money for the operation to save the sight of Jennie (Sally Yeh), after he accidentally blinds her. Li Ying (Danny Lee) is the cop on Ah Jong's trail, but the two of them have to join forces to take down a vicious Triad boss. *The Killer* is perhaps the definitive heroic bloodshed movie, with its climactic shootout in a church complete with doves flying amidst the carnage in slow motion. Chow and Lee had already worked together in Ringo Lam's brilliant *City On Fire* and their onscreen reunion here is an action masterpiece.





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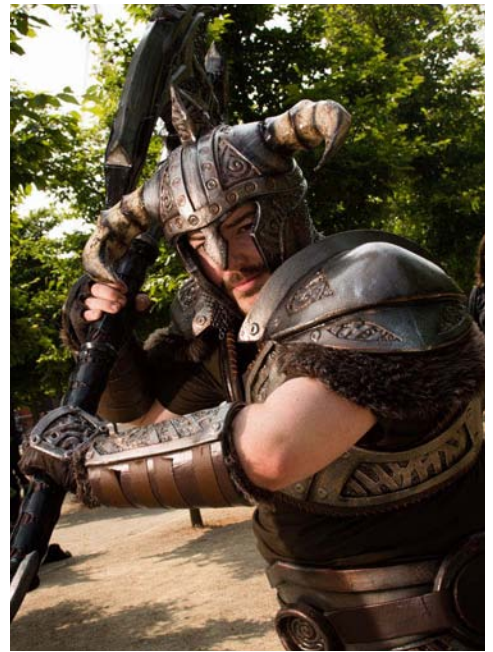


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SATURDAY



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Apollo Cosplay showing off
some amazing armour skills.



Sena Tinsley: do not
mess with her...

SUNDAY



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Phil Ryan holding up the local corner shops in full regalia.



Amazing Mars Attacks! cosplay. More please!



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Pungent costuming from Funkster Cosplay.





COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTOR'S EDITION



[ANIME REVIEW]

HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? I'M SAKAMOTO! Go Go Sakamoto!

2 JULY // MANGA // 15 // COMEDY // £49.99 (COMBI) // 325 MINS // 12 EPISODES

PLOT Oh, you hadn't heard? Sakamoto (first name unknown) is the coolest new student on the campus, and he's already causing a stir! Whether he's walking to school, flipping burgers, or engaging in a sword fighting duel with a rogue hornet, nothing can stand in the way of Sakamoto's secret skills!

Studio Deen's adaptation of Nani Sano's quirky comedy manga is definitely a series with an unusual premise – while most shows would go out of their way to present viewers with a flawed protagonist, someone who can grow and change as the story develops, *Sakamoto* does the exact opposite. The core premise of *Haven't You Heard? I'm Sakamoto*, and indeed the central joke of the entire series, is that the titular hero is perfect in every way.

While the episodes do manage to give Sakamoto a lot of different arenas and setups in which to show off his comical secret skills, the mileage of the occasionally repetitive humour might vary from viewer to viewer. Other series, such as *One Punch Man*, use a similar style of comedy, but in such a way as to parody an existing genre (such as those pesky, overpowered shonen superheroes), but *Sakamoto's*

high school slice-of-life setting might be a little too broad for its hero's antics to generate a lot of laughs from some. However, at only 12 episodes, the series doesn't outstay its welcome, and if what you're after is a light-hearted and often bizarre comedy that doesn't take itself too seriously, you'll find that here.

Studio Deen have also gone above and beyond to make sure the series looks as good as it can. Some comedies can be guilty of phoning it in a little bit when it comes to the art, in the hopes that the humour – being the most important aspect of the series anyway – will be enough to carry the show on its own. That isn't the case here, however, and the art brings new life to Sano's densely detailed illustrations. In fact, a lot of the humour lies in Sakamoto's deadpan deliveries (as it did in the original manga). That's right, though apparently perfect, Sakamoto is completely clueless about the ways of the world – and so the effort that has gone into adapting his antics for the screen is a real feather in the series' cap.

All in all, *Haven't You Heard? I'm Sakamoto* might not blow any minds, or even necessarily split any sides, but there's definitely a laugh or two in this series' run, and certainly worse ways to spend a few hours.

It won't be for everyone, but there's no denying that *Sakamoto* is a series with both a unique premise and protagonist, and will likely be entertaining enough to win over even those who are initially sceptical of Sakamoto's supposed charms... ●

★★★★☆

IF YOU LIKED THIS

If this series merely whets your appetite for more slice-of-life comedy weirdness, Manga's upcoming release *Love, Chunibyo, and Other Delusions: The Movie* might also be up your alley!

Inverities

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FOR THE FIRST time ever, Yuen Woo-Ping's action classic *Iron Monkey* is available in the UK on Blu-ray, and thanks to those kind folks at Eureka Classics, we have five copies to give away to lucky NEO readers!

This iconic movie features now-legendary fight choreography, and follows Wong Kei-ying (Donnie Yen) as a physician and martial artist who is mistaken for the masked vigilante and Robin-Hood-style hero Iron Monkey. How will he and the real Iron Monkey defeat the corrupt government officials making the locals live a misery?! You should bet it involves lots of fighting.

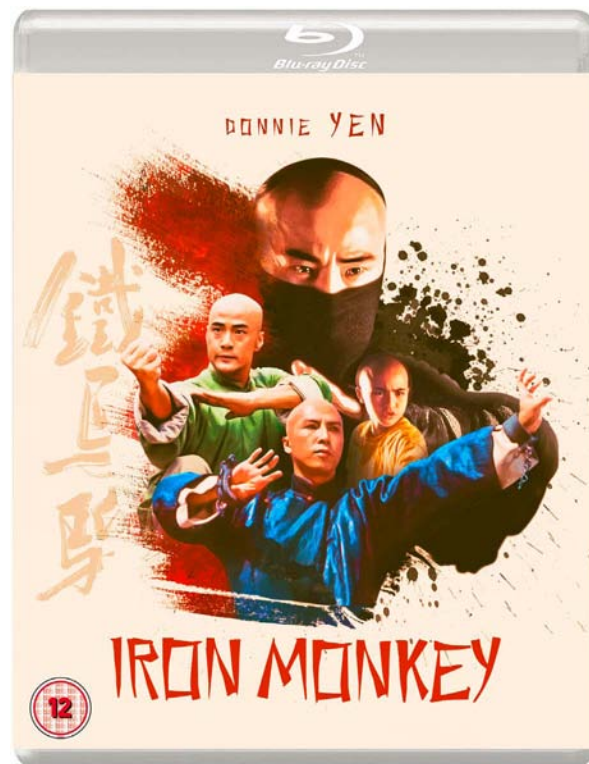
Out now priced £19.99, the first print run of *Iron Monkey* will feature a limited edition O-card and collector's booklet featuring a brand new essay, 1080p presentation from a brand new 2K restoration, plus Cantonese or English audio, and interviews with star Donnie Yen, producer Tsui Hark, and actors Yu Rong-Kwong, Li Fai, and Angie Tsang. There's also a 16 minute behind the scenes documentary, an eight minute featurette on Hong Kong action choreography featuring Alex Yip, and footage of Li Fai and Angie Tsang competing at the 2003 Wu Shu Championships.

If you want to win a copy of *Iron Monkey*, all you have to do is answer the following question correctly to be entered into our prize draw.

WHICH OF THESE IS NOT AN ACTOR IN IRON MONKEY?

A) DONNIE YEN B) JACKIE CHAN C) LI FAI

You can enter by emailing your answer along with your name and address to neomagcomp@gmail.com, with the subject header NEO 177 Iron Monkey competition. Alternatively, you can enter by sending the correct answer on the back of a postcard, along with your address, to the Uncooked Media editorial address printed on page 084. Closing date: 19 July



TERMS AND CONDITIONS

No correspondence will be entered into. No employees of Uncooked Media or the companies providing the prizes may enter. No cash alternative is offered to these prizes. Entries are only valid if they reach us by the closure date. Multiple entries will be disregarded. The publisher's decision is final. Good luck!

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[ANIME REVIEW]

A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS/ CLEOPATRA

The Godfather Of Manga Gets Smutty

OUT NOW // THIRD WINDOW FILMS // 15 // EROTICA // £19.99 (DVD), £29.99 (BLU-RAY) // 242 MINS

PLOT In *A Thousand And One Nights*, lowly water vendor Aldin rescues a beautiful girl from a slave auction which is just the first in his series of strange adventures. *Cleopatra* is the story of the Egyptian queen used as an erotic weapon to stop the Roman invasion of her country.

At the end of the 1960s, Osamu Tezuka was still riding high on the success of *Astro Boy* and *Kimba The White Lion*, but he wanted to prove that anime could be more than just children's entertainment.

The Animerama series of films was intended to show the medium's potential for handling grown-up material, and collected here are two of the three films from that endeavour (absent is 1973's *Belladonna Of Sadness*). *A Thousand And One Nights*, directed by Eiichi Yamamoto, draws loosely from the collection of Arabic folk tales often known as *Arabian Nights*, following Aldin – Aladdin – from one escapade to the next. The script feels very episodic and goes completely off the rails at the mid-point when Aldin is side-lined by two genies.

Cleopatra is even more strange, opening with a scene set in a future where Earth is at war with the planet Pasatorine. Upon learning that the Pasatorines are working on something called Cleopatra's Plan, they decide

the only logical step is to send three agents back into the past to observe Cleopatra in the hopes her life will offer some clues as to the nature of the Pasatorine plot.

Tezuka's vision of anime suitable for adults is defined by female nudity at every opportunity and non-explicit sex scenes. Otherwise, the tone and style are indistinguishable from his kid's shows, filled with childish humour and slapstick. One moment Cleopatra is using her feminine wiles to seduce Caesar (who is inexplicably olive green), and then the next Caesar is bouncing around the room like Daffy Duck. A fight between two gladiators sees one of them flattened with a giant flyswatter, which feels like a move straight from Chuck Jones or Friz Freleng.

The time travel aspect of the plot is hugely underdeveloped, becoming essentially irrelevant for most of the story, and the decision to use live actors with animated faces in the prologue and epilogue makes those scenes remarkably creepy. There are some interesting moments – one montage in *Cleopatra* draws from a host of famous paintings and is quite lovely – but the tone veers wildly. Cleopatra's tragic death is followed instantly by a gag involving her pet cheetah.

Perhaps the best way to view these films now is as historical curiosities. There are some interesting visuals, but Tezuka falls far short of his desire to prove anime's maturation. Nudity does not guarantee maturity – Donald Duck wears no pants. ●

⬢⬢⬢⬢⬢

TRIVIA

While *A Thousand And One Nights* was a hit in 1969, *Cleopatra* flopped so badly in Japan that it drove Tezuka's Mushi Productions towards eventual bankruptcy in 1973.



[FILM REVIEW]

GIFTED

The thrill of the kill

OUT NOW // 88 FILMS // 18 // THRILLER // £12.99 (DVD), £15.99 (BLU-RAY) // 103 MINS

PLOT Dumped by his girlfriend Sujin (Bae Jung-hwa), out of work, and angry at the world, Minsoo (Kim Beom-jun) starts stealing luxury cars with Sujin's delinquent kid brother Yeonwoo (Jeon Beom-su). After he kills a former colleague in a fit of rage, Minsoo believes he's finally found his life's calling – murder.

Juhn Jai-hong's drama attempts to comment on materialism and amorality in modern Korea, although it never quite comes together. It feels like Juhn is aiming for a modern, Korean take on *Taxi Driver*, with a socially isolated, frustrated protagonist slipping ever deeper into his own obsessions and depravity. Kim

Beom-jun starts out as a figure of sympathy, working during the day in a chicken factory and freelancing as a driver for drunk businessmen at night. His murder fixation has a Freudian angle, being explicitly tied to sexual release in the movie, but it feels like it might work better as a commentary on wealth, class and privilege than perversion. Jeon Beom-su is very good as the petty thief out of his depth, but Bae Jung-hwa is underused as Sujin, mostly used as the impetus for Minsoo's foray into criminality. The script takes too long to get up to speed, but then the resolution feels rushed with a somewhat anti-climactic denouement.

Juhn is better at mood and atmosphere than character, clumsily leaving the final message about how easily people are corrupted in the hands of the underdeveloped Sujin. *Gifted* is a flawed but engaging portrait of one man's descent into madness. ●

☆☆☆☆

IF YOU LIKE THIS

Na Hong-jin's *The Yellow Sea* and *The Chaser* are compulsory viewing for Korean crime fans, while Yang Ik-june's *Breathless* is a bruising portrait of life on the fringes of society.



[ANIME REVIEW]



HEAVEN'S LOST PROPERTY

Not So Angelic

25 JUNE // MVM ENTERTAINMENT // 15 // COMEDY, ECCHI, HAREM, SCI-FI // £29.99 (DVD), £34.99 (BLU-RAY) // 350 MINS // 14 EPISODES

PLOT Tomoki Sakurai has had the same dream over and over, about an angelic woman, and he always wakes up crying. When an angel falls from the sky and begins calling him master, Tomoki finds his normal life becomes a little more exciting.

Heaven's Lost Property skates the line between your generic harem and attempting to be something a little darker, and the first episode's twists and turns were rather shocking. Sadly, it's still brimming with typical anime tropes and some of the characters are a tad too outlandish, and these two aspects undermine the decent story that's lying underneath – it's



WORDS BY MITCHELL LINEHAM

difficult to relate with Tomoki when he's happy to invade his best friend's privacy.

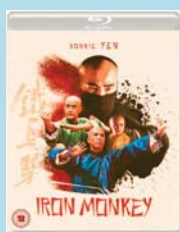
The animation by studio AIC holds up after nine years, despite clearly not being a hugely funded anime, although the retro big eyes that take up most of a character's face, and the abundance of fanservice won't be for everyone. It looks older than it is due to the SD DVD transfer being far from crisp, but the English dub and soundtrack carry over well and are decent, although a far cry from how good dubs are today.

***Heaven's Lost Property* is an average anime that could've been something more, but it falls back onto familiar harem territory too often to easily overlook it. It doesn't excel in any of the aspects it tackles, and it suffers from juggling too many genres without focusing on any one.** ●

☆☆☆☆

HEAVEN'S FOUND PROPERTY

The original manga ran for 20 volumes between 2007 and 2014, and it spawned two seasons and one OVA episode.



[FILM REVIEW]

IRON MONKEY

Slow down, for heaven's sake!

OUT NOW // EUREKA // CERT 12 // MARTIAL ARTS // £19.99 (BLU-RAY) // 90 MINS

PLOT Iron Monkey (Yu Rong-Kwang) steals from the rich and gives to the poor, which makes him remarkably unpopular with the corrupt local officials. Believing that Iron Monkey is a crook, Wong Kei-Ying (Donnie Yen) attempts to arrest him, before they join forces against the evil monk Hin Hung (Yen Shi-Kwan).

Yuen Woo-Ping's *Iron Monkey* hails from 1993 when the new wave of wu xia movies, heralded by Tsui Hark's *Swordsman* and *Once Upon A Time In China*, was at its height in Hong Kong cinema.

The film was produced by Tsui Hark and shares a great deal with his own *Once Upon A Time In China*, including Yen Shi-Kwan as the lead villain, and action director Yuen Shun-Yi who has a prominent supporting role as Master Fox, a likeable rogue who works for the unscrupulous Governor Cheng (Jimmy Wong).

It's an interesting addition to the Wong Fei-Hung canon, featuring his father Wong Kei-Ying in a lead role, while Angie Tsang plays Fey-Hung as a boy in a gender-swapping performance. Tsang came from a background in Wu Shu, and while she excels in the acrobatics and martial arts scenes, she's decidedly clunky as an actress, and never pursued a career in the movies hereafter.

The protagonists, Yu and Yen, are two of the top action performers in Hong Kong cinema, but *Iron Monkey* falls victim to the same failing as Yuen Wo-Ping's *Wing Chun*, from the following year, in the poor direction of the many fight scenes. Despite the plot concerning Wong Kai-Ying and his son, two of the most celebrated figures in the history of the Hung Kuen kung fu style, the action choreography is all about wirework and special effects. There's virtually no Hung Kuen on display and the decision to speed up the action scenes so much renders the fights goofy and comical, where they should be intense and exciting. It almost completely squanders the wealth of talent in front of the camera, and it feels more like a wu xia movie, populated by gravity-defying supermen, than a kung fu movie.

Yuen Wo-Ping was never the most consistent director – even some of his best films like *The Magnificent Butcher* and *Drunken Master* have a tendency to be a collection of loosely-connected skits and fight scenes where the narrative is very much a secondary concern. *True Legend*, from 2010, is perhaps the worst example of this tendency. *Iron Monkey* hangs together somewhat better as a narrative, even if the tone and performances are inconsistent. Where Yen is stern and serious as Wong Kei-Ying, many of the supporting players, particularly Jimmy Wong, mug shamelessly through their scenes.

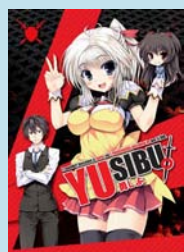
Iron Monkey has been hailed as a classic of '90s Hong Kong cinema, but it exemplifies many of the shortcomings – and some of the strengths – of Cantonese filmmaking of the time. It's a damn shame about the fight scenes. ●



EXTRAS

A wealth of bonus materials, featuring interviews with Donnie Yen, Tsui Hark, Yu Rong-Kwang, Angie Tsang, and stunt performers Li Fai and Alex Yip.

SERIES COLLECTION



[ANIME REVIEW]

YU-SIBU: I COULDN'T BECOME A HERO, SO I RELUCTANTLY DECIDED TO GET A JOB

To Live And Die In Retail

OUT NOW // MVM // 18 // COMEDY // £29.99 (DVD), £34.99 (BLU-RAY)
// 288 MINS // 12 EPISODES

PLOT Raul Chaser was once a hero-in-training, ready to devote his life to fighting the evil Demon Lord. But then someone killed his infernal majesty and now Raul works in Leon, a consumer goods store where the newest employee Fino turns out to be the daughter of the dread Demon Lord.

In many respects *Yu-sibu* is a typical harem show. There's the bland lead character, Raul, surrounded by a squad of attractive young women including Fino, shop manager Seara, co-workers Nova and Lore, plus Elza and Lamdimia at the convenience store adjacent to Leon, and former aspiring hero Airi. But it's unlike most harem shows as it's clear from the start that Fino and Raul are the centre of the story and the other characters are window-dressing, so there's none of the 'girls competing for the same guy' trope so common to the format.

That lack of competition for Raul's affections is indicative of the series' biggest problem – the absence of dramatic conflict. After a decent start that sets up the characters, establishing that both humans and demons are struggling to find new roles in life now that the war between their races is over, the show meanders along inoffensively for far too long.

There's always plenty of fanservice, which seems at times like all it has to offer; much of it dispiriting. There's an old man who repeatedly gropes Nova; "He's probably just feeling lonely" says Raul, as an excuse. Instead of drama there are episodes devoted to Fino working in the convenience store, which involves watching her learn to use the coffee maker, and almost an entire episode devoted to installing an air conditioner.

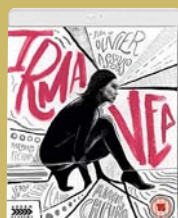
Fortunately, the story finally settles on a direction for the final four episodes which involve a plot to make Fino the new Demon Lord. Here, there's some actual dramatic conflict and even some action to enjoy. The battle between store boss Seara and the head villain is entertaining as she fights him using an array of everyday items, from a vacuum cleaner and a hair dryer to a rice cooker. It's a shame there isn't more of this humour in the rest of the running time, which often feels dry. Almost every episode seems to have a different director and storyboard planner, so that might explain the shifts in tone and pacing. Production values are modest and the decision to have one key fight take place offscreen smacks of tight purse strings on the budget.

Yu-sibu undeniably dips heavily in the middle, but the concluding story arc helps redeem the series and shows that perhaps the creators should have focussed more heavily on the fantasy elements and less on scenes of people working in retail.●

★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS

Fancy more harem comedy? Check out *Nisekoi: False Love, Is This A Zombie?*, *Baka And Test: Summon The Beasts*, and *The Devil Is A Part-Timer*.



[FILM REVIEW]

IRMA VEP

Maggie Cheung gets lost in translation

OUT NOW // ARROW ACADEMY // 15 // DRAMA // £24.99 (BLU-RAY)
// 99 MINS

PLOT Arriving in Paris to star in a remake of the 1915 *Les Vampires*, Maggie (Maggie Cheung) feels lost amidst the chaos of the production. The director, René (Jean-Pierre Léaud), is falling apart from stress, while costume supervisor Zoé (Natalie Richard) is attracted to Maggie.

After playing the comic relief to Jackie Chan in the *Police Story* series and then finding her niche in effects-heavy action films like *The Heroic Trio* and *Dragon Gate Inn*, 1996's *Irma Vep* was a complete departure for Maggie Cheung.

French director Olivier Assayas casts the actress as herself which, when coupled with the documentary-like shooting

style, produces the most naturalistic performance of Cheung's career. It's fascinating to see the star in a setting so far removed from the over-the-top dramatics of her wu xia work. There's superb chemistry between Cheung and Richard, whose fiery temperament is a complete contrast to Cheung's reserved poise, while French cinema icon Jean-Pierre Léaud looks brittle and tense as René. One of the film's most striking sequences comes when Cheung dons her Irma Vep costume and sneaks around her hotel to spy on another guest. For a moment she seems to become the character from René's film, blurring the line between performance and performer.

The '90s saw Jackie Chan, Jet Li and Chow Yun-Fat try their luck in Hollywood with mixed results, but Maggie Cheung shines in this French production thanks to Assayas' clever direction and the strong cast. A cineaste's delight. ●

★★★★★

TRIVIA

Cheung and Assayas were married from 1998 to 2001 but their split seems amicable as he subsequently directed her in 2004's *Clean*, for which she won Best Actress at Cannes.



[ANIME REVIEW]



MY HERO ACADEMIA

SEASON TWO PART TWO

OUT NOW // SONY PICTURES // 15 // ACTION // £36.99 (BLU-RAY),
£29.99 (DVD) // 325 MINS // 12 EPISODES

PLOT The UA School Sports festival might be over, but the life of a hero is only just beginning for Midoriya and his super powered classmates. In this second half of the season, the fledgling crusaders begin their training in earnest!

The first half of *My Hero Academia*'s second season didn't hold anything back when it came to all the action, drama, and super powered mayhem that viewers have come to expect from the series. But it would be easy for the series to slip into the old shonen staple of 'training montage mode', in which the characters develop their abilities for a few dozen episodes before

the next big bad rears their ugly head.

And while the dozen episodes of part two do in fact focus on underdog hero Deku's internship with the garrulous and eccentric pro hero Gran Torino, the pacing of the series rarely slows down, developing characters and building the backstory of the world at a rapid speed before diving straight back into the action. Part of *My Hero Academia*'s popularity seems to be due to the fact that it learns from the mistakes of the shonen series that have come before it, and this set of episodes go a long way towards proving that.

These episodes might not wow you as much as those of the season's first half, but there are still a lot of intriguing moments and exciting action in this collection to make it well worth a watch, while also setting the stage for season three. ●

★★★★★

AWARDS

This season recently picked up a number of accolades at the Crunchyroll Anime Awards – including 'Best Animation' and 'Best Action' – so now is probably a good time to see what all the fuss is about!

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[GAME REVIEW]

DARK SOULS REMASTERED

Back to the Beginning

OUT NOW // BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT // 16 // RPG // £34.99
(PS4, XBOX ONE, PC, SWITCH)

PLOT *Dark Souls Remastered* may initially seem as if it's lacking a story, but there's plenty of lore for those who are willing to find it. As a cursed undead, you fight your way through Lordran to either reignite the First Flame, or to put it out.

Dark Souls Remastered takes players back to the beginning of the worldwide phenomenon, but this time it's 60fps and looks far prettier. Arguably the hardest title in the *Dark Souls* series, *Dark Souls Remastered* is difficult to the point of frustration, but its rewarding gameplay and rich world will reel you back in

rather than push you away.

Not only is it hard, it's slower than its sequels, but you'll be rolling around with your sweaty palms, aiming to take down colossal foes – and smaller ones who are just as deadly – as you battle through the bleak but interesting world of Lordran, and Oolacile as the game's DLC, *Artorias of the Abyss*, is included. It looks and feels notably better than it did back on PS3 and Xbox 360 thanks to Polish studio QLOC's love and care, although it's still impossible to make a half-decent looking character! Thankfully, your creation will be hidden under armour most of the time...

***Dark Souls Remastered's* difficulty isn't for everyone, but the satisfaction you get from defeating a boss and reaching a new area is high incomparable. It deserves its lofty status in the gaming community, and you owe it to yourself to give it a go. ●**

★★★★★

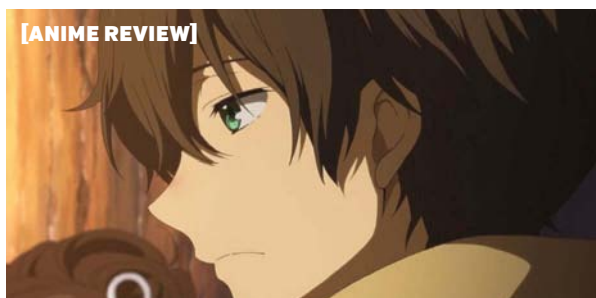
WORDS BY ANDREW OSMOND

THE MEME DREAM

Many games with higher than average difficulty are referred to as the *Dark Souls* of their genre, and it all began here!



[ANIME REVIEW]



HYOUKA PART 2

More Kyoto Animation loveliness

25 JUNE // ANIME LIMITED // PG // COMEDY, ROMANCE, MYSTERY //
BLU-RAY (£59.99), DVD (£29.99) // 285 MINS // 14 EPISODES

PLOT The four young sleuths of Kamiyama High School – boys Hotaro and Satoshi, girls Eru and Mayaka – still have mysteries to solve, including a thief at their school's Culture Festival who seems to be working to a private agenda...

In its second half, *Hyouka* stays beautiful, delightful and experimental – more little puzzles and big feelings for its school-aged sleuths. Much of the volume takes place during a manically bustling school culture fair, full of distractions, digressions, running gags, and a mystery gracefully stranding together. The later stories are one-offs. One has fun putting Hotaru and Eru into

a familiar situation – they get inadvertently locked up together. Another has the same duo hearing a cryptic announcement over their school's loudspeaker and building up a hypothetical crime through the whole episode, without leaving their club room.

Of course, this puzzle-solving inflames their passions, whether they want to admit it or not. The final emotional payoffs are delivered without breast-beating or shouting, by characters endeavouring to be calm, dignified and sensible. In a dialogue-heavy show, they're terrified they'll never be able to say the right thing. Ultimately, it's the beauty of the animation that may save them.

The mysteries are slightly less strong, but the artful merging of low-key romance, slice-of-life drama and humorous complications is eloquent and satisfying. ●

★★★★★

EXTRAS

Japanese and English soundtracks. The Collector's Edition contains an 84-page art book, with two sections: "Character setting" and "Props and Art setting."

SAILING JULY 20TH 2018

CN
CARTOON NETWORK

ADVENTURE TIME

PIRATES OF THE ENCHIRIDION



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COSPLAY CORNER

NEO READERS STRUT THEIR STUFF!

[RIGHT] Ana Amari from *Overwatch* by Sarah Barnes (facebook.com/CloakAndScissorsCosplay)

[BELOW] Ochako Uraraka from *My Hero Academia*. Cosplayed by Abbey Parkes / YumiCos on Facebook (facebook.com/yumicosplays).

[BOTTOM RIGHT] From *Bioshock: Infinite*, it's our first Elizabeth Comstock! Cosplayed by Megan Heptinstall (facebook.com/meganheptinstallofficial).

All photos by James Coaton (Dr Whereo Photography: facebook.com/DrWhereoPhotography)



Our second Elizabeth Comstock
(*Bioshock: Infinite*). Cosplayed by
Beth Brookes/Minachi on Facebook





[ANIME REVIEW]

WOLF'S RAIN

The world ends with a howl



OUT NOW (ULTIMATE BLU-RAY), 25 JUNE (BLU-RAY) // ANIME LTD // 15 // FANTASY, TRAGEDY // £149.99 (ULTIMATE BLU-RAY), £39.99 (BLU-RAY) // 690 MINS (600 MINS EXCLUDING RECAPS) // 30 EPISODES (INCLUDING 4 RECAP EPISODES)

PLOT In a doom-laden wintry world, people are ruled by the mysterious “Nobles”, scientist-sorcerers who fight over an artificial girl created by alchemy. Meanwhile, four intelligent wolves roam the land, seeking the same maiden – to open their way to Paradise.

Fifteen years old, *Wolf's Rain* remains a unique vision in anime. To western eyes, it's a retelling of *Pilgrim's Progress* or of motifs from Arthurian legend. It also parallels the fiction of C.S. Lewis, and not just his best-known “Narnia” books. The story of characters on a devotional quest to *open paradise* – and *Wolf's Rain* never uses that phrase mockingly or ironically – could hardly be more religious in sensibility. Never mind that the main characters are wolves (who can project the appearance of humans), or that they're questing through an alternate world of haunted forests, alchemical experiments and steampunk-style vehicles.

The travellers are led by Kiba, who's uncompromising in his faith. In medieval terms, he's the “parfit knight,” even with no armour and only his furry white paws to carry him. Tsume is the hard-man (wolf) loner, forever snapping against the quest that carries him on. Hige is the cheery hedonist who disavows any spirituality. Toboe is the feisty

runt, whose childishness is his weakness and weapon.

Then there's the woman they find, follow and protect, Cheza the flower maiden. This fairy tale of femininity is a light-footed paradox, a fabrication of nature who's the opposite of fakery. Cheza runs with her wolves (and they are *hers*) over a river of flowers; she spins through the air like an ethereal helicopter. Such moments look timelessly lovely, more than making up for the occasional weird character face and the surfeit of dingy-coloured scenery.

Sometimes the characters fight surprising-shaped monsters – there's a great battle on ice involving a *Terminator*-style “smart” tank. But the main challenges are the temptations to quit, the mazes to confuse, the *false* paradises more alluring than the real thing. Some of the wolves' enemies live in giant castles, but then the bewildered canines find a modern city of self-absorbed citizens and Big Brother cameras.

The show often lacks real vigour, the constant shocks and twists of an *Attack on Titan*. Strongly designed, the characters are clear, vivid types, which fit the show's vision, but their adventures and arguments can feel monotonous and stodgy at times. *Wolf's Rain's* payoff is in its last few episodes, where a succession of devastatingly moving scenes leads to one of the most unforgettable finales to any anime.

A warning: while *Wolf Rain* is often described as a 30-part series, it's *really* 26 parts, as four middle episodes (15 to 18) are redundant recaps. You can skip from part 14 to 19 without missing a thing.

A visionary treatment of the classic quest story. Some parts lack excitement, but the finale is astonishing. ●



EXTRAS

Japanese and English tracks. The “Ultimate” Blu-ray edition includes a 100-page art book, with sections on Characters, Concept Artwork and Settings, as well as “The Art of Wolf's Rain”. The package also includes three A3 posters and nine art cards. On-disc extras include interviews with the Japanese staff and cast.



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WORDS BY ANDREW OSMOND

NEO RELEASE ROUND-UP

THE STATE OF THE UK MARKET THIS MONTH

BEFORE WE GET into the upcoming titles, we apologise for a major omission in last issue's round-up. At the start of June, Manga Entertainment released a vast 'deluxe' edition of *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, though only through one exclusive retailer, the Zavvi website. This set contains 11 Blu-rays, carrying both TV seasons (52 episodes in total), both compilation films and the feature-length *Solid State Society* sequel. The set also sports newly restored subtitles and includes a 140-page book with interviews, profiles and more. Be warned, though, it's limited to a thousand copies, and at time of writing is nearly sold out.

Looking ahead, 25 June sees Anime Limited lining up loads of fantasy. *RE: Zero* Part 1 timeloops the genre, with a hero from our world starting out on a typical fantasy adventure when things go *Groundhog Day*. That'll be a Collector's Blu-ray and a standard DVD. So will *Rokka – Braves of the Six Flowers*, which starts as a quest and then becomes more of a whodunit.

There'll also be standard Blu-rays of *Wolf's Rain*, reviewed this issue, and *Sword Art Online II* part 2. Masaaki Yuasa's film *Night is Short, Walk on Girl* turns night-time Kyoto into a realm of zany magic folk – that'll be a Collectors Blu-ray / DVD combi, plus standard Blu-ray and DVD editions. Then there's the second half of *Hyouka*, reviewed this issue – that's a Collector's Blu-ray and a standard DVD. Manga Entertainment releases the 17th *One Piece* collection on DVD, passing the 400th episode of Luffy's adventures.

On 2 July, Manga brings us the 13-part first season of *Haven't You Heard? I'm Sakamoto*, a comedy about a "sophisticated, suave, sublime" male student, as a limited Blu-ray / DVD combi pack. Anglo-Japanese school friendships are renewed in *Hello!! Kinmoza*, released by Manga in the same format, while the second half of *Occultic; Nine* comes to Blu-ray and DVD.

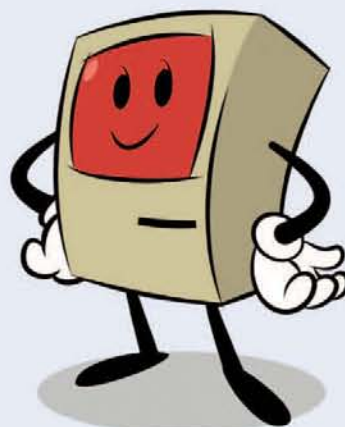
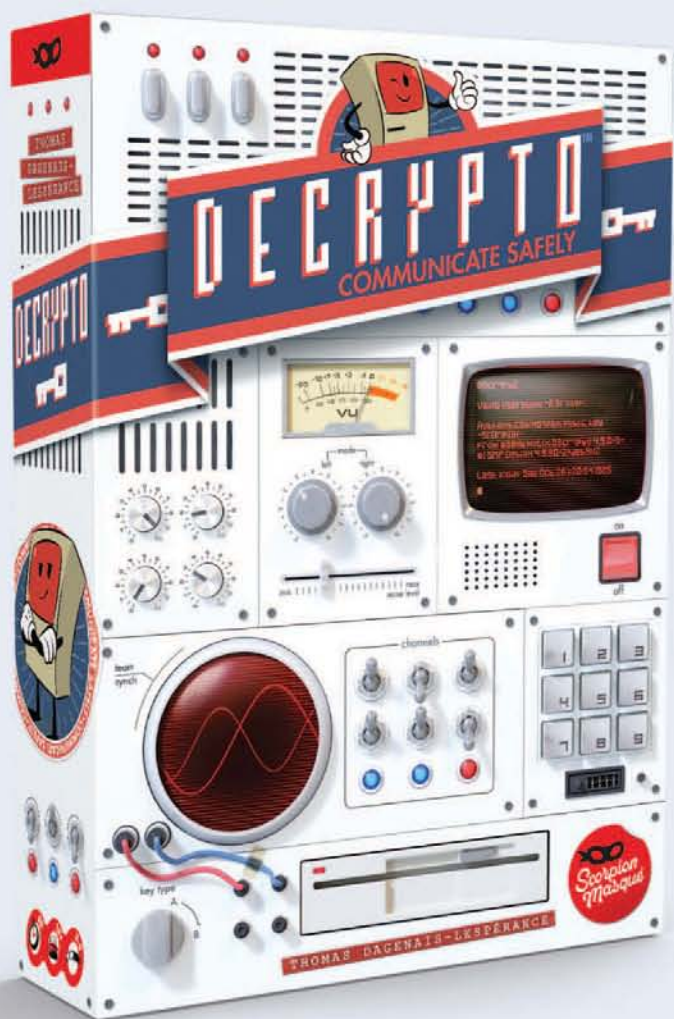
MVM also weighs in on 2 July with the first volume of *The Asterisk War* (Blu-ray and DVD), where super powered schoolkids fight it out in a tournament, with more of a sci-fi angle than *My Hero Academia*. MVM launches the third



1. Yuasa's riotous and beautifully chaotic *Night is Short, Walk on Girl* is due soon from Anime Limited. 2. *Haven't You Heard? I'm Sakamoto* is reviewed in this issue on page 064. 3. Action fantasy *Nobunaga the Fool* heads our way from MVM on 9 July. 4. A second entry for director Masaaki Yuasa with *Lu Over The Wall*.

Initial D film (Blu-ray and DVD), subtitled *Dream*. Then the standard Blu-ray and DVD of *Gate* arrive on 9 July, followed by a DVD collection of the full *Nobunaga the Fool* on 16 July.

For Anime Limited, 9 July sees the live-action film of *Tokyo Ghoul*, delayed from last month, as a Blu-ray and DVD. On 16 July, Yuasa's family-friendly mermaid romp, *Lu Over the Wall*, debuts as a Collectors Blu-ray / DVD set (with a 52-page art book), plus standard Blu-ray and DVD editions. The standard Blu-ray and DVD of *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust* also come out 16 July. ●



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[FILM REVIEW]

THE SPIRITUAL BOXER

The birth of the kung fu comedy

OUT NOW // 88 FILMS // CERT 12 // MARTIAL ARTS // £17.99 (BLU-RAY) // 98 MINS

PLOT When his master is too drunk to perform his ceremonial duties, Hsiao Chien (Wong Yu) takes over his role, pretending to be possessed by the gods to drive away evil spirits. When he accidentally becomes famous for his supernatural feats, Hsiao runs up against a gang running an extortion racket.

Rleased in 1975, *The Spiritual Boxer* was a movie of firsts. It was the directorial debut of Lau Kar-Leung as he made the move to the director's chair from working as an action choreographer. And, well ahead of Yuen Wo-Ping and Jackie Chan's *Snake In The Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*, it was the first true kung fu comedy.

That's not to say there had never been any humour in kung fu movies prior to this film. The long-running *Wong Fei-Hung* series, starring Kwan Tak-Hing, had a regular comic relief character in the form of Buck-Toothed Soh, played by Sai Gwa-Pau, and King Hu wasn't afraid to include a gag or two in films like *Come Drink With Me* from 1965 and 1972's *The Fate Of Lee Khan*. The difference here is that Lau's film does something that none of those others do – it pokes

fun at the figure of the invincible kung fu hero. Hsiao Chien is a fraud. All of his mythical feats of strength are staged; when he's possessed by the gods it's all an act.

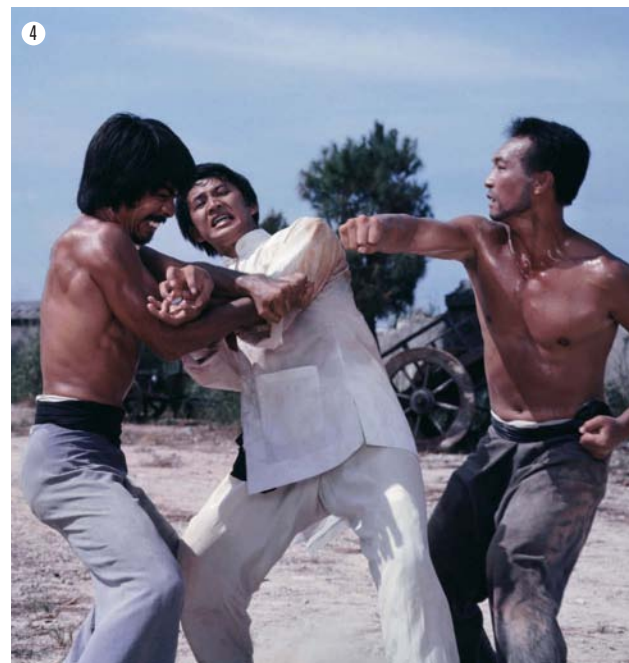
Wong Yu's performance in the lead role is very much a blueprint for the characters that would make Jackie Chan and Fu Sheng major stars in just in a few years' time, playing a mischievous young rascal with a quick wit and a talent for troublemaking. Wong Yu really deserved much wider acclaim than he enjoyed during his career in the movies. He was a good screen fighter, a decent acrobat, and had a talent for comedy. He's well matched with Lin Chen-Chi, who plays the female lead Jin Lian, providing a romantic angle to the tale. Jin Lian is hot-tempered and fierce, quick to slam Hsiao Chien into his place with a put-down or the occasional beat-down.

The screenplay, by Shaw Brothers studio's most prolific writer Ni Kuang, has a tendency to meander a little. The opening scene shows a trio from the I Ho Chuan, a society of kung fu mystics, performing for the Empress Dowager, but they're never seen again thereafter. Hsiao Chien's master, Chi Keung (Kong Yeung), appears at the start of the film, then disappears completely for the bulk of the running time, only returning just in time to provide his pupil with a little coaching during the final showdown with the bad guys. Similarly, there's a subplot about a haunted house in the middle that never really feels connected to the rest of the narrative.

Lau's work is very different to that of King Hu or any of the wu xia filmmakers in that he has no truck with magic.

KEY TALENT

Wong Yu started acting in romantic teen dramas like *Young Passion*. Check out his performance in Lau's *Executioners From Shaolin* as Hung Wen-Ting, the first gender-fluid kung fu hero.



Everything that appears fantastical in his films, from *The Spiritual Boxer* all the way through to *Legendary Weapons Of Kung Fu* in 1982, always turns out to have a much more secular origin.

Just as this film makes fun of kung fu heroes, cutting them down to human size, Lau takes the mysticism out of the martial arts. There are no swordsmen flying through the

"UNLIKE THE MOVIES OF CHANG CHEH, FOR WHOM LAU WAS A REGULAR ACTION CHOREOGRAPHER, *THE SPIRITUAL BOXER* DOESN'T CULMINATE IN A BLOODBATH."

air, and any ghosts or ghouls invariably hide a human being who's up to no good.

It's not Lau's most action-intensive movie, with less martial arts mayhem than later films like *Shaolin Challenges Ninja*, or *Executioners From Shaolin*. But the action scenes do not disappoint. Wong Yu is particularly good in the sequences where his character is supposed to be channelling the Monkey King, and the cast of bad guys includes several of Shaw Brothers' most reliable movie heavies.

There's Lee Hoi-Sang, Ng Hong-Sang, who had roughly 200 film appearances between them, and the late, great

stuntman Fung Hak-On, who worked regularly with Jackie Chan, all of whom provide Wong Yu worthy opponents to tussle with. Lau Kar-Leung's speciality as a martial arts choreographer was the Hung Kuen style, and the final showdown between Hsiao Chien and the killers-for-hire played by Lee Hoi-Sang and Ng Hong-Sang sees Wong performing the classic Five Animals And Five Elements form, firmly putting Lau's stamp on the action.

The conclusion of their clash provides another reminder that the film is a comedy. Unlike the movies of Chang Cheh, for whom Lau was a regular action choreographer, *The Spiritual Boxer* doesn't culminate in a bloodbath. The good guy triumphs, but the villains are arrested rather than slaughtered, suggesting that Lau was very keen to draw a line between his work and that of his former boss. In his autobiography, Chang Cheh claims it was his idea for Lau to make *The Spiritual Boxer* about debunking mysticism in the martial arts, and that he arranged for Lau to work with writer Ni Kuang for the production. It's possible he's telling the truth, but *The Spiritual Boxer* is quite unlike any of Chang's nihilistic, male-dominated tragedies, which is perhaps why it launched Lau's directing career so successfully.

A key film in the history of kung fu cinema that, happily, is great fun too. Lau Kar-Leung would soon outdo himself with such classics as *The 36th Chamber Of Shaolin* and *Mad Monkey Kung Fu*, but *The Spiritual Boxer* boasts a great lead with gags and martial arts aplenty. ●

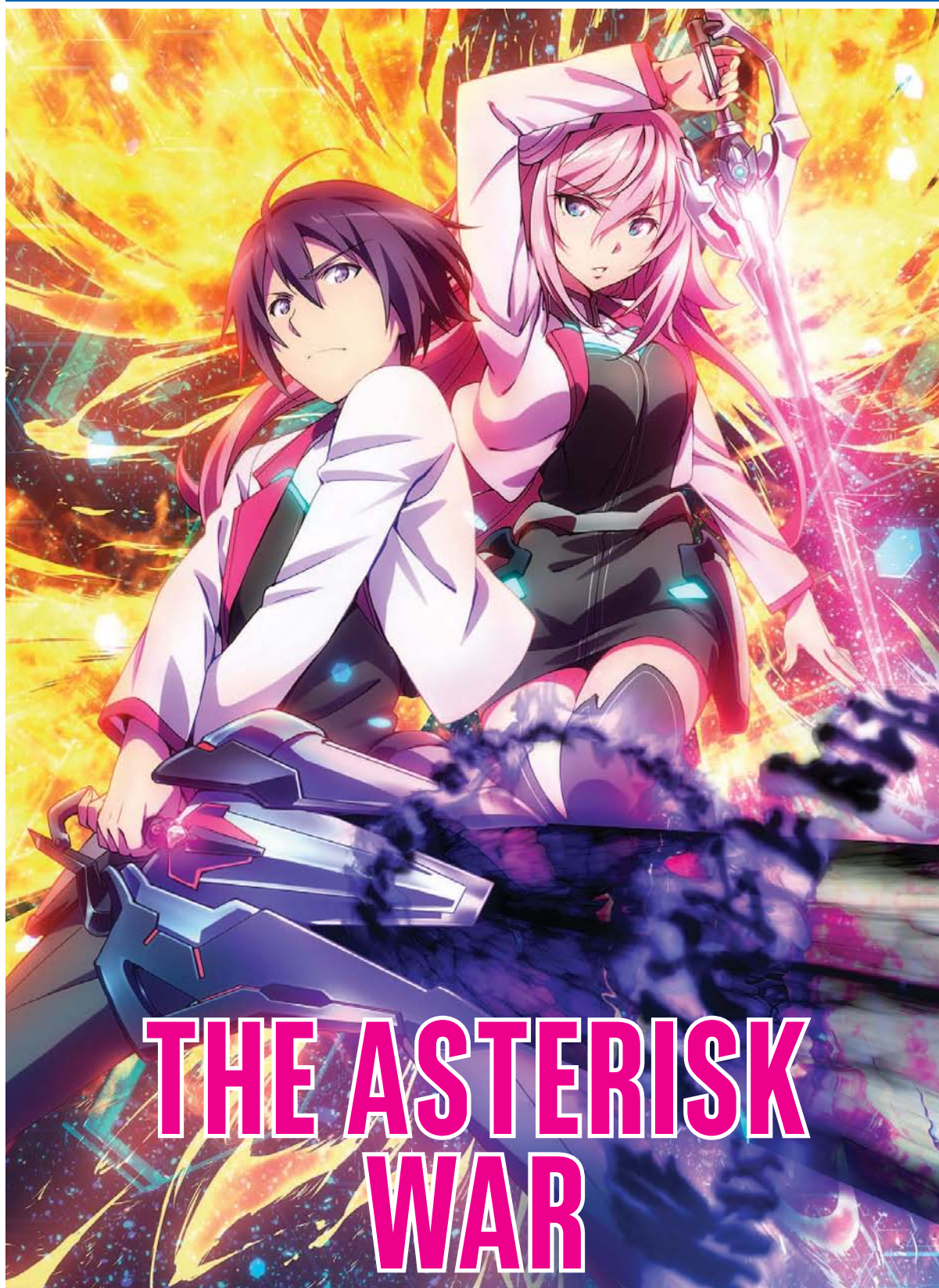


1. Hsiao Chien channels the spirit of Guan Yu, the mighty general of yore! **2.** Ti Lung has a cameo as a kung fu mystic, demonstrating his imperviousness to spears. **3.** Don't touch me, I'm famous. **4.** Veteran movie bad guys Ng Hong-Sang (on the left) and Lee Hoi-Sang (on the right) give Wong Yu all he can handle.

TRIVIA

Lin Chen-Chi later starred in Tsui Hark's *Dangerous Encounters: First Kind*, about a gang rampaging through Hong Kong. The film was initially rejected by Hong Kong's censors for its violence.

NEXT ISSUE



THE ASTERISK WAR

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MANGA EXTRACT

SARAH SORCERY

By Marius Smuts and Eric Michael Ella

FOR YOUR READING delight in this issue of NEO, we present an extract from *Sarah Sorcery: The Lady By The River* by Marius Smuts and Eric Michael Ella. "This is the introduction of the main characters of *Sarah Sorcery*, Sarah and Ling, and their surrounding city of London," Smuts told us of the action in the following pages. "Sarah, an amateur Demon Hunter with magic abilities, tries to catch a low-level demon, the Tokoloshe, but unfortunately her inexperience shows as she has to be rescued by Ling, a member of a mysterious warrior clan named The Children of Osiris. We are also introduced to Sarah's mum, a witch who doesn't want Sarah to use her powers as it attracts demons, and last but not least, the powerful but lovable French Bulldog Diego who plays a big role later in the book.

"After their initial meeting, Sarah and Ling decide to work together to catch a Japanese Yokai (supernatural creature) called Lady Kiyohime," Smuts told us, describing the action that takes place in the rest of the comic. "Lady Kiyo has escaped from her prison and is killing people along the River Thames. Ling's clan were actually responsible for safeguarding of the statue that imprisoned Lady Kiyo and Ling now feels responsible for finding her. This statue is only the first of several statues with demons inside which have gone missing, leaving an avenue for future instalments of *Sarah Sorcery*."

We asked Smuts to tell us more about the inspiration behind the series. "The previous book I did, *Rabbit: The Scarred Ones*, was aimed at older readers. The Rabbit character is very macho and the book is quite violent. With *Sarah Sorcery*, I wanted to do something for readers of all ages with a bit more humour. I also really wanted to make a couple of female heroes, as in my previous books there weren't any. I have always been interested in sword and sorcery comics and films, so *Sarah Sorcery* is my version of that set in the modern world. Another thing I wanted to achieve was to make a manga that could be easily adapted into film."

Smuts also told us more about the other projects he has worked on in the past. "Besides writing comics, I am a filmmaker. I wrote and directed the feature film *In Transit* in 2014, a story about a comic book artist caught in a love triangle, which is on Amazon Prime, and my newest film project is *Comic Book Kingdom*, a feature length documentary about the UK comic and manga industry. I interviewed UK based manga artists INKO and Chie Kutsuwada and also Kev Hophood, creator of *War Machine* and Laurence Campbell amongst others. That film has been selected for a couple of festivals and nominated for Best Feature Documentary at the Brighton Rocks Film Festival. It should be released on Amazon Prime later this year.

"Comic-wise, in 2016 I released the 80-page graphic novel *Rabbit: The Scarred Ones* which I launched at MCM London, and in 2017 I released *Rabbit: Sketches and Strips*. The *Rabbit* book is set in the same world as *Sarah Sorcery* and *Rabbit* actually has interaction with the same clan Ling from *Sarah Sorcery* is from."

If you'd like to find out more, find Smuts online at www.ms-productions-uk.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/MSPProductionsUK, and Instagram @mariusssmuts.



THERE... ON THE BRIDGE... SOMEONE STARING AT ME... OKAY SARAH, GET A GRIP, THEY'RE PROBABLY JUST OUT FOR A MIDNIGHT STROLL LIKE YOURSELF.

IT'S LATE, AND QUIET. I PROBABLY SHOULD BE HOME FINISHING OFF MY WORK BUT, OF COURSE, WHO AM I TO DO THE RIGHT THING?

NO ONE'S AROUND, PERHAPS THEY'RE MORE SENSIBLE THAN ME... FUNNY THING WHY DO I FEEL LIKE...
... LIKE I'M BEING WATCHED?

IT'S OKAY SARAH, THERE'S NOTHING OUT HERE.
JUST KEEP WALKING.

OKAY, THAT DIDN'T SOUND VERY... HUMAN.

UMLUNGUI!

WHO'S THERE!?

UMLUNGUI!



BACK OFF CREEP!

SPLASH!

ZZZAP-GR!!

I TRIED A LOCATOR SPELL TO SEE IF I COULD FIND A DEMON I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD ACTUALLY FIND ONE!



UMLUNGU!
ME...NO THIRSTY...
ME HUNGRY

HOW² HE SHOULD HAVE MELTED!

ZZZAP-RRP!



COME OUT!

THIS ISN'T FUNNY!

GRRRAK!

WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?

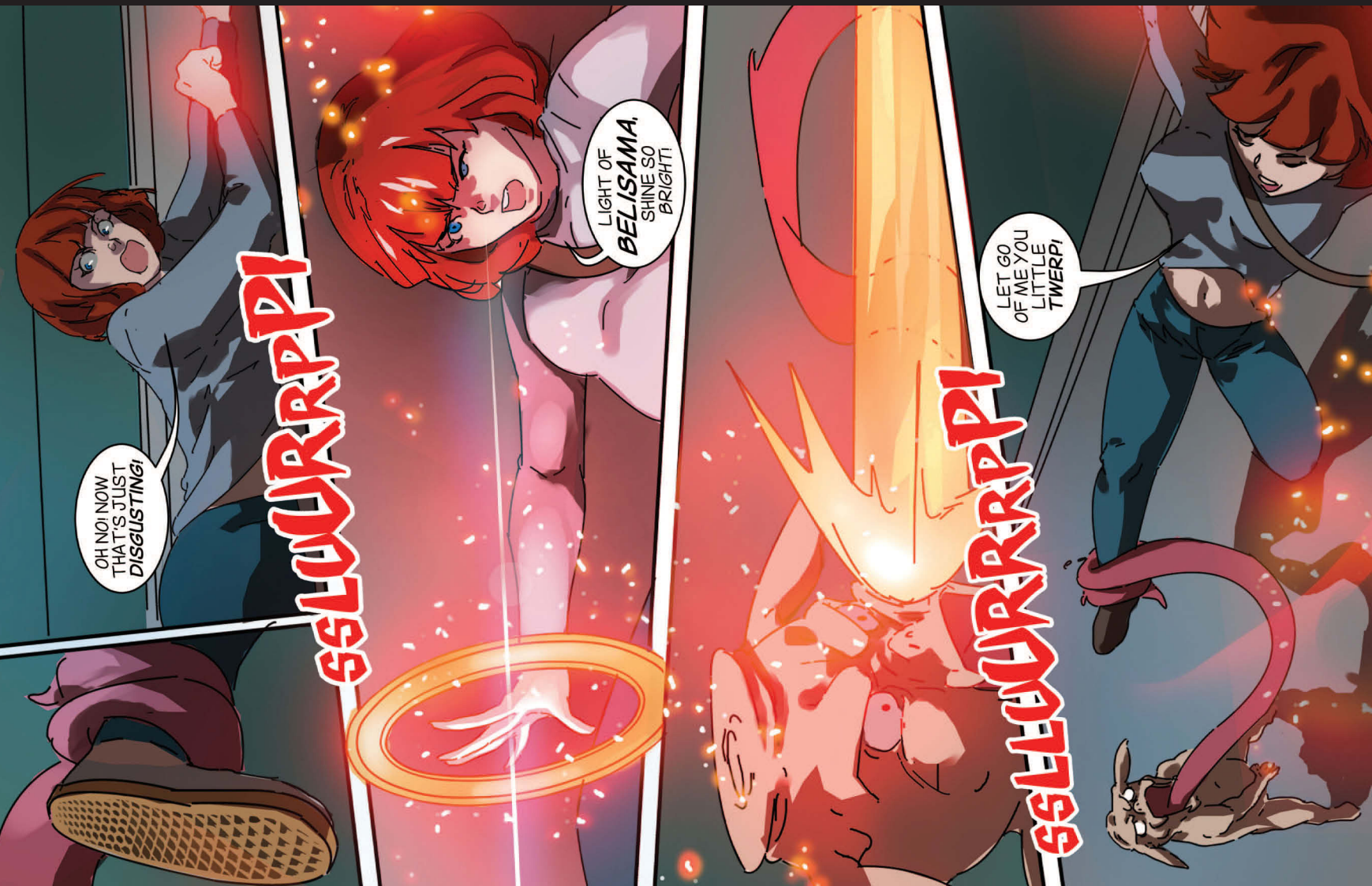
HHHOOOSH!!

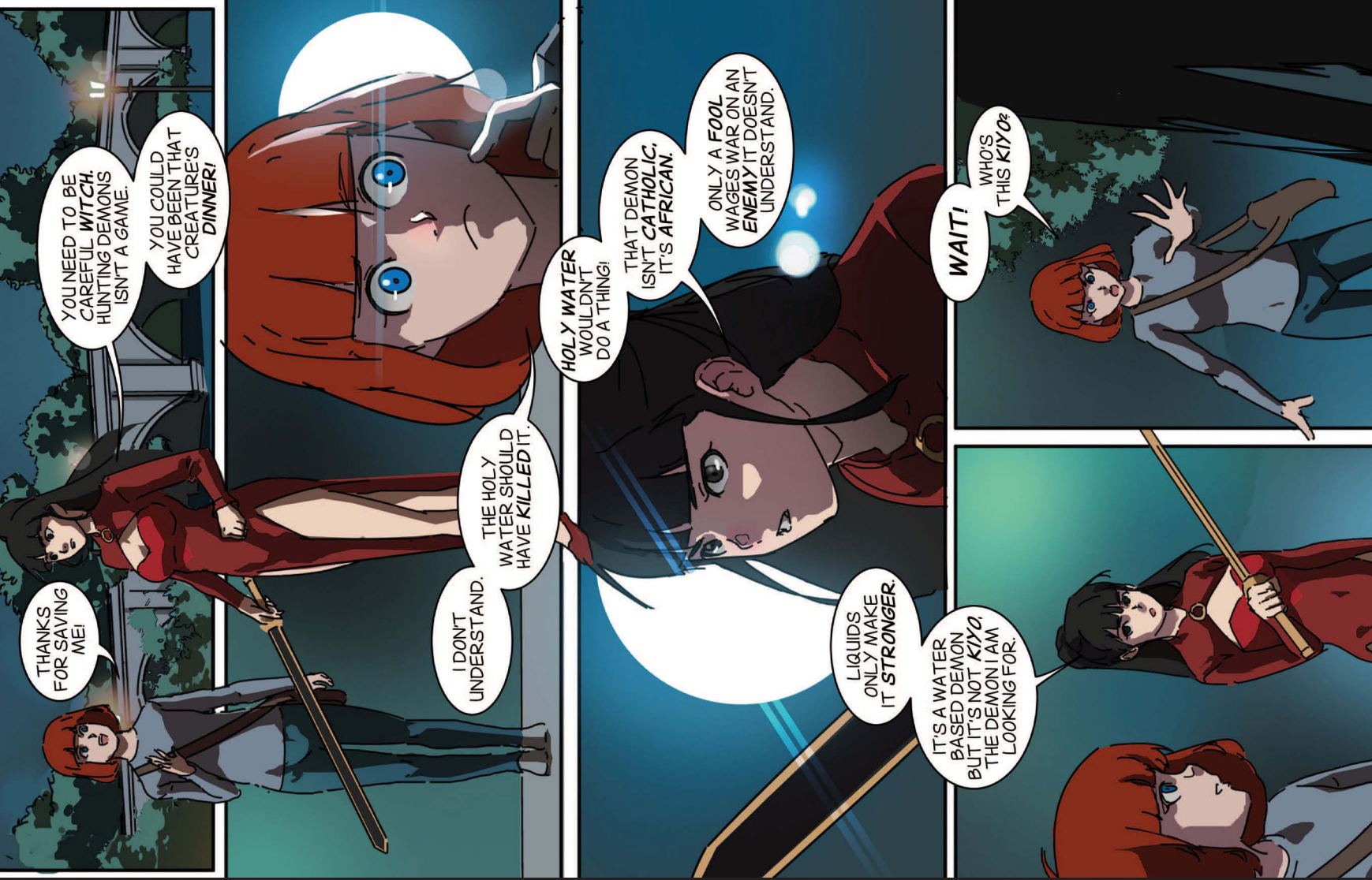
UMLUNGU!
NICE...FRESH...
MEAT!

WOW IT'S...IT'S AN ACTUAL REAL... LIFE... DEMON!

I'VE GOT YOU NOW MONSTER!

HAVE A TASTE OF SOME HOLY WATER!







THAT GIRL WAS AMAZING.
ONE SLICE OF HER SWORD AND
IT WAS GOODNIGHT TO THAT
LITTLE TWERP.
BUT SHE WAS RIGHT,
I NEED TO BE MORE PREPARED...

THE DEMON SHE'S LOOKING
FOR MUST BE REALLY
POWERFUL.



HAMPSTEAD - LONDON

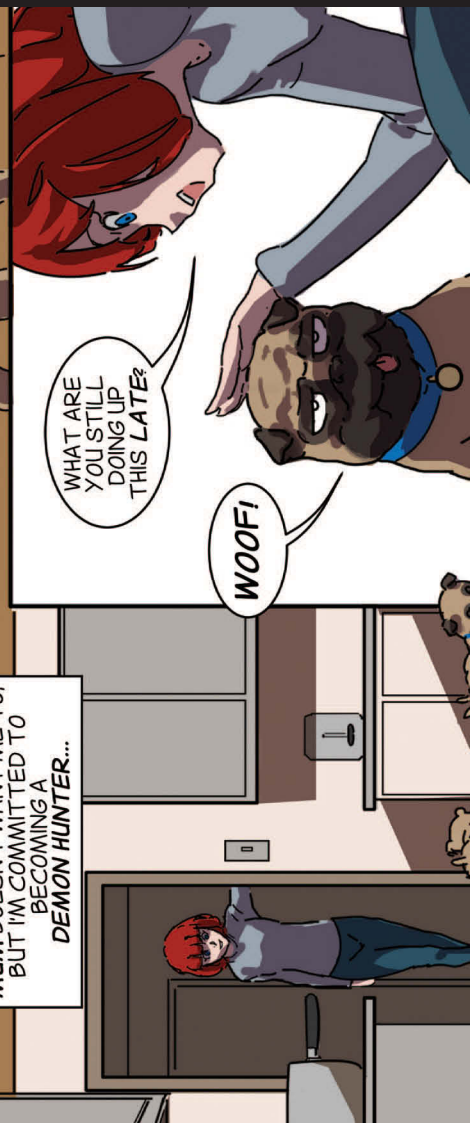
DIEGO!

HOW ARE
YOU MY
BIG BOY?!

WOOF!



MUM DOESN'T WANT ME TO,
BUT I'M COMMITTED TO
BECOMING A
DEMON HUNTER...



WHAT ARE
YOU STILL
DOING UP
THIS LATE?

WOOF!



BETTER
YET,
WHY ARE
YOU SO
LATE?

I WAS
AT THE...
LIBRARY.

DON'T
LIE!
I CAN
SMELL MAGIC
ALL OVER
YOU!

YES I
USED IT.
IT'S MY
BIRTHRIGHT!



YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND!

DEMONS CAN
SMELL MAGIC. THE
MORE YOU USE IT,
THE MORE THEY'RE
ATTRACTED
TO YOU.

THEN LET
THEM
COME!



YOU AREN'T A
SUPERHERO!

MAYBE I
NEED
TO BE!

IF YOU'RE
TOO SCARED TO
USE MAGIC, DON'T
HOLD ME BACK!

YOU'RE
GOING TO GET
YOURSELF
KILLED!

TO BE
CONTINUED IN
SARAH SORCERY

A large, solid red silhouette of the Japanese archipelago is positioned on the right side of the poster, extending from the top right towards the bottom left. It serves as a background element for the text.

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Alex Jones introduces you to the wonderful world of Bushiroad: from the battling of *Cardfight!! Vanguard!* to the cute adventures of *BanG Dream! Girls Band Party!*

©Project Vanguard2018 illust: 伊藤彰



Clash Of The Clans

Every *Cardfight!! Vanguard* creature hails from one of six different factions, which are then further broken down into a total of 24 different clans. Each clan has their own traits and abilities, so it's well worth researching which suit your play style before building a deck.

Given the number of long-standing brands that have continued to dominate the collectible card game market for decades, when a game is able to show up and wrestle them for that throne it has to be something pretty remarkable. For the past 11 years, Bushiroad have produced their fair share of popular games, but one in particular has managed to stand tall and dominate through its easy to grasp gameplay mechanics, and its supporting network of anime and manga titles. Relaunching this year to make itself more accessible than ever, welcome to the world of *Cardfight!! Vanguard*!

HOW TO PLAY

Your spirit has been transported to Cray – an alien planet not too dissimilar from Earth, but inhabited by all manner of magical beings and monsters. As you're simply an astral projection,

right off the bat you only have two powers at your disposal; the ability to both summon ("call") and possess ("ride") the various creatures that live on the planet. The units that the player chooses to possess are then known as their Vanguard, leading their forces into battle against their opponent. With the cry of "Stand up! Vanguard!", each player reveals their chosen core unit and the battle begins.

The rules of *Cardfight!! Vanguard* are simple. Using a combination of both Vanguard and support units, the aim of the game is to deal damage to your opponent, with the first player to take a total of six damage being declared the loser. A lot of the game's simplicity lies in the fact that *Cardfight Vanguard* only features one type of card, featuring the various creatures you are able either possess or summon. Each creature is designated a grade between zero and three, with the player's chosen Vanguard initially starting at grade zero. From there they can "ride" to a card one grade higher, as well as summon up to five surrounding assist units below or equal to that of their Vanguard.

Opponents are defeated by successfully matching or besting their combat strength, using a combination of both the attacking unit's power and the support unit directly behind it. However, your opponent can also block attacks using any excess unit cards they have in their hand, reducing the total amount of damage that the attacked unit takes. Units may also have additional skills that come in during play, as well as special one-off abilities known as Trigger effects. As well as offering a notable power increase, one Trigger effect allows the opportunity to heal damage – a move that could become crucial in the final stages of play.

BUILDING A FRANCHISE

The release of the game was quickly followed up by an anime adaptation in 2011, which has since spanned hundreds of





"THE RELEASE OF THE GAME WAS QUICKLY FOLLOWED UP BY AN ANIME ADAPTATION IN 2011, WHICH HAS SINCE SPANNED HUNDREDS OF EPISODES ACROSS NUMEROUS SEASONS"



episodes across numerous seasons. The original iteration starred Aichi Sendou, a timid junior high student who was given a "Blaster Blade" card by a boy named Toshiki Kai when he was younger. Several years later the pair encounter each other once more at their local card store Card Capital, where Aichi reveals that he's secretly prepared his own deck in the hopes that he would one day be able to challenge Toshiki.

As the story progresses and Aichi's Cardfight skills develop he forms "Team Quadrifoglio" (or just Q4 for short) with fellow players, and competes in both regional and national tournaments, before not only discovering that the planet Cray exists but also helping defend it from dark forces threatening its destruction. At the same time, a manga version was also launched, originally appearing in *Kerokero Ace* before moving over to the company's own *Bushiroad* monthly magazine. While the manga starred the same characters as the anime, it featured its own unique storyline, resulting in many key differences from its onscreen counterpart.

More uniquely *Cardfight!! Vanguard* has even been the subject of two live-action specials, the first of their kind for any card game spin-off series. The 2012 feature-length drama special *Stand! Vanguard* starred singer-songwriter Daigo (of the J-rock band Breakerz) as himself – a wanderer who encourages a bullied schoolboy to gain courage through his love of the game. Daigo would then return two years later in a special *Cardfight!! Vanguard* movie, which combined both live-action and animated segments.

TAKE IT IN YOUR STRIDE

As with other similar card games, new versions bring about new additions and mechanics, with *Cardfight!! Vanguard* undergoing its first major revision in 2015 with the introduction of *Cardfight!! Vanguard G*. Changes included the introduction of a new legion mechanic where certain cards can seek out corresponding ones in order to attack together, as well as the implementation of the G-Units – a special type of optional >>>

1. Q4's Misaki Tokura: a face like stone, but a heart of gold!
2. Surprisingly, Perfect Raizer is not in fact a Gundam. 3. A rather colourful attack from Dragonoid Overlord.



Phases Of Play

A typical *Cardfight!! Vanguard* turn takes place over a total of six phases - Stand, Draw, Ride, Main, Battle and End. After readying your cards for battle, you can draw one additional card from your deck, before "Riding" your Vanguard one additional grade, preparing your assist units and then launching an all-out attack against your opponent!

>>> card that runs from its own separate deck within the game. These extremely powerful cards work within an additional "Stride" phase, adding an additional single-turn power up to your Vanguard in play.

A new way to play also meant a new way to watch, as the anime relaunched with a brand new cast for a further five seasons. Taking place three years after the end of the original generation, *Cardfight!! Vanguard G* follows new character Chrono Shindou - a high-schooler resigned to a life of loneliness until he finds a Vanguard deck in his locker. He inevitably becomes hooked on the game, teaming up with new friends Shion and Tokoha to enter the National Tournament. Like the original series, later seasons feature more fantastical storylines, including an invasion of Earth by units from Cray itself.

NEW BEGINNINGS

2018 marks a big turning point for the *Cardfight!! Vanguard* franchise as Bushiroad announced an entire reboot of the series - a move that affects both the card game itself and its expanded media. Firstly the format of the game has been split into two different categories; a "Standard edition" for newcomers which works entirely off the new cards and simplified mechanics (such as the removal of the G-Units and G-Zone), and a "Premium Edition" for existing players who want to continue on with their older cards and decks. The baseline powers of the newer cards have also been adjusted so that they are able to competently compete in both versions of the game.

Meanwhile a new iteration of the anime has begun as part of the spring 2018 season, taking the form of a complete reboot

that more closely follows the original manga storyline. In a move to make the series even more accessible to newcomers, Bushiroad have taken a leaf out of Bandai's book and followed their release pattern for the *Gundam Build Fighters* series - releasing fully subtitled episodes every week via their official YouTube channel.

Such is Bushiroad's dedication to this new generation of *Cardfight!! Vanguard* that they've embarked on a 300 date worldwide tour to promote the game, known as the 2018 *Cardfight!! Vanguard Caravan*. The tour includes 11 UK dates taking place in late June, where attendees will be able to learn more about the new version of the game as well as pick up a brand new demo deck exclusive to the event. There will also be exclusive promo cards for some of Bushiroad's other card games, such as *Weiss Schwarz*, *Future Card Buddyfight* and *Dragoborne -Rise to Supremacy-* available too. So if you're looking to join in on the fun but don't know where to start, be sure to not miss out on one of these events! ● >>>





CARAVAN 2018

22 June

- 1.00pm Geeks Headquarters, Chesterfield
- 3.00pm Patriot Games Sheffield, Sheffield
- 6.00pm IQ Games Centre, Huddersfield
- 8.00pm Fan Boy Three, Manchester

23 June

- 12.00pm GTG Games & Hobbies, Stoke-on-Trent
- 3.00pm Big Orbit Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury
- 5.00pm Global Gaming, Birmingham
- 5.00pm Geek Retreat Birmingham, Birmingham

24 June

- 11.00am Lost Ark Games, Stevenage
- 1.00pm Leisure Games, Finchley, London
- 3.00pm The Games Shop Aldershot, Aldershot



ROCK AND ROLL ALL NIGHT... ...BAND PARTY EVERY DAY!

Welcome to CiRCLE, a new live house looking to host the hottest bands in town – and it's your mission to recruit them. Introducing the high-school five-piece Poppin' Party, who are bringing along with them fellow bands Roselia, Afterglow, Pastel*Palettes and Hello, Happy World!. This is *BanG Dream! Girls Band Party!*, the award-winning mobile game from Bushiroad and developers Craft Egg Inc.

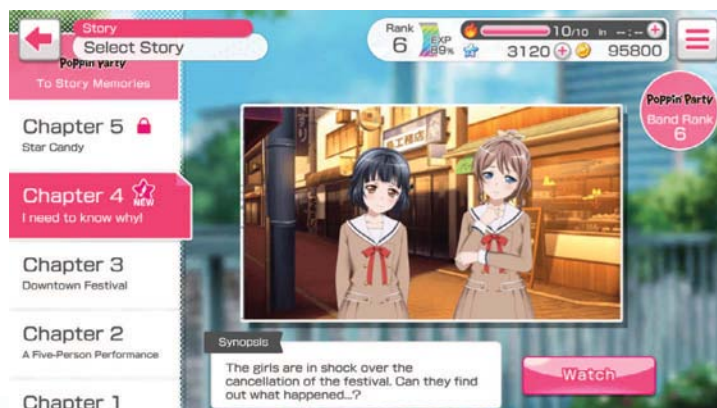
The main story follows you (the player) beginning your new job at CiRCLE, where you are introduced to both your co-worker Marina Tsukishima and the members of Poppin' Party. As it turns out, Marina's had her eye on other bands for some time now, and needs your help to recruit them for a show that the town will never forget. Work your way through a library of visual novel style sequences, complete with spoken dialogue from each band member's voice actress. On top of that, each band also has their own individual stories, chronicling their school lives, band practices and more in a series of misadventures completely separate from the main story. Finally of course like any good mobile game, *BanG Dream!* also regularly hosts a variety of Event Stories, which in addition to giving players a new side adventure, also yields exclusive prizes.

Between chapters there's still plenty to do, as you're free to wander in and out of CiRCLE to perform a number of different functions. Chat with the girls as they practice to earn some quick experience points, or purchase items from the store

to deck out CiRCLE with kit it needs – boosting your stats during live events in the process. In the band screen you can form up to ten different bands with the girls you've recruited so far, enter practice mode to raise their level or skill or just give them the obligatory idol costume change.

Finally there's the Gacha area, where you can trade your hard-earned stars from playing the game for the chance of earning rare cards to boost your band's abilities. You're definitely guaranteed some two-star rank cards, but if you're very lucky, you might just be able to nab yourself a coveted three-star card as well.





TAKE TO THE STAGE

But without first levelling up both your player rank and individual band levels, you aren't going to progress very far. That's where the rhythm game element comes into play. Choose from putting your skills to the test alone in a "Free Live" or teaming up with random players across the world in "Multi Live" mode, keeping to the beat by tapping, holding or flicking on the notes as they appear onscreen. You can adjust the difficulty and note speed freely according to your skill level, and at the end of each song you'll be presented with a rank from C to S. The better you do, the more prizes you'll receive.

As well as being able to choose from the wide selection of original songs the game has, *BanG Dream! Girls Band Party!* also features a number of popular anime opening covers from each of the five bands. These include offerings from *Attack on Titan* (*Guren no Yumiya*), *K-On!* (*Don't Say "lazy"*), *Gurren Lagann* (*Sorairo Days*) and even classics such as *Digimon* (*Butterfly*) and *Fullmetal Alchemist* (*Ready Steady Go*). While some of these are available right from the start, others you'll have to work for. Raise your rank, earn those gems and get purchasing!

BANG DREAM WORLD TOUR

If franchises like *Love Live!* and *The Idolmaster* have taught us anything, when groups like these plan their takeover they do it from every front. While the mobile game was first released in Japan in March 2017, *BanG Dream* began life two years earlier as an ongoing manga series in Bushiroad's *Monthly Bushiroad Magazine*, with a further two strips joining it in 2016. *BanG Dream!* also received its first anime adaptation just ahead of the game's release, made available to UK fans on Crunchyroll. The 12-episode series focuses on the early beginnings of Poppin' Party, as lead singer and guitarist Kasumi Toyama brings the five girls together in the hopes of finding the heart-pounding, sparkling sound she's always been looking for.

With the game out on both sides of the ocean *BanG Dream* is now truly making its plans for world domination, with second and third seasons of the main anime announced for 2019 as well as the *Pastel Life* spin-off series (focusing on the girls from Pastel*Palettes) currently airing. The girls are truly assembled, and it looks like they may be here to stay. Download the game for free now on iOS and Android! ●

Know Your Bands

Each of the five bands in the game has their unique style. Poppin' Party are the plucky newcomers who make up for their inexperience with gusto, while Roselia are a near-professional gothic J-rock group. Meanwhile true to their name, Hello, Happy World! have made it their sole mission to make the world happy through music!

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